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THE BROKEN SNARE



BY LUDWIG LEWISOHN

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LUDWIG LEWISOHN
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"Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the SNARE IS
BROKEN, and we are escaped."—*Psalm cxxiv.*

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To My Wife

THE BROKEN SNARE

I

"I TOLD you not to hold it that way!"

A misery of exasperation vibrated in the voice that rose above the shrill clatter of broken crockery. Frances saw neither her mother nor the drab servant girl to whom the words were spoken; but the apartment was so small that she heard even the angry rustle of skirts and the sound of dragging feet on the bare kitchen floor. With quiet desperation she laid down the volume she had been trying to read. The noises robbed her of repose, not by reason of their loudness, but because their quality expressed, with an insistence that tortured every nerve, those elements of her life which she abhorred. She was afraid that her mother might come in and speak querulously of the servant's carelessness. She would listen, as so often before, quietly. It was a single remnant of grace that she never protested, never repulsed the plaintive confi-

dences of her mother, whom, at moments, she pitied with such passionate tenderness. But if she could escape! She leaned so far out of the window that she could see to the left the dusty August green of the trees upon Morningside Heights. Masses of sombre cloud shadowed the hill and heavy drops of rain began to fall. She would have been glad to slip out into the autumnal rain, could she have done so unobserved. But her heart grew sick at the thought of her mother's mournful solicitude which she must first encounter. There was nothing to do but to remain quiescent and let the grey hours gather over her.

The fading afternoon light was merciful to the mean respectability of the room, to the carefully mended carpet, the heterogeneous chairs, the small, old-fashioned piano, the general air of eager preservation. But in her present mood Frances was painfully conscious of these things. They were to her the symbols of that ignoble solicitude which poverty in her home entailed. She was not afraid of privations. She would have welcomed a bareness frank and unashamed. It was the tawdry trappings above the stark sordidness of their life that, in hours of pitiless observation, drew from her tears which she, at her age, should not have

known. She heard her mother coming in, and attempted to look more alert.

Mrs. Garnett gathered her apron in her worn right hand and wiped her forehead with it. Her face was cruelly furrowed, her brow puckered, not with cares of a noble cast, but with small, miserable and incessant worries. The scanty grey hair was gathered into a knot no larger than an egg; the greyish brown skin of her cheeks and neck hung in loose, pendulous folds. Whenever Frances saw the face and figure clearly, a compassion so immense overwhelmed her that she yearned over her mother with protecting care. The struggle to remain respectable in New York on twelve hundred dollars a year had made of Mrs. Garnett a thing of scorn: it had made of her body a rag, and of her soul a bundle of mean anxieties. Only her mother-love, instinctive and unfortified by intelligence, had remained to her of the more gracious possessions of other years. The falling dark now hid her from Frances.

"But, Fanny, you're not dressed yet?"

The girl hated to be called "Fanny."

"What's the use of dressing? I'm very well as I am."

"But your father has invited Mr. Ware to dinner to-night."

"Well?"

"Well, don't you see that you should try to make a good impression?"

"No, I don't see."

"For Heaven's sake, don't be a fool! Ware, I am told, has a hundred thousand dollars if he has a penny!"

"Oh!" Frances moaned.

Mrs. Garnett came over to her and put an awkward hand on her shoulder.

"I know just how you feel about it, my child. But I tell you there's no curse like being poor. I'd like to save you that. You don't understand; you think you don't want to give up your ideals for money. All right. But if you have no money, I tell you there's not an ideal, there's not a last rag of decency that you won't have to throw away. Don't I know it? Don't I know it?"

The woman's voice rose to a strident wail.

"Look at me!"

"Oh, mamma, please don't!"

Something in that crude and cruel self-revelation stung Frances beyond endurance. It seemed to her

that her mother gloated, with violent self-pity, upon her degradation and decay.

"You'll dress, won't you?"

"Yes, yes; presently."

When Frances was left alone she sat still with her eyes closed. Visions passed before her, the salient scenes of her life, which had tempered and, she believed, warped her soul. But she also saw the fine grey head of her father, and to think of it comforted her. It was only at rare moments that Dr. Garnett entertained a sense of his failure; and she was glad that he, at least, however much it may have contributed to their misery, was careless of material things. But his brief hours at home were only tiny pools of light in the universal drab of petty cares and compromises, intervals of healing silence amid clamorous discussions of the incompetence of servants and the cost of meat. A memory came to the girl from which she drew back instinctively with every nerve.

A few weeks ago she had accompanied her mother on a Saturday night expedition to One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. They had waited long to be served in a huge green-grocer's establishment, and Frances had looked about her. Under the sharp electric light stood, huddled to-

gether, scores of women of the lower middle classes, in shabby black cloaks and bonnets grotesquely set awry. With worn and callous fingers they handled the huge heaps of vegetables, meats and poultry exposed for sale. They shook their heads in contemptuous deprecation of the wares, and haggled shrilly with the tired and brutal clerks. Upon the shrunk faces of the women glared a desperate intentness to make the little sums, clutched in clenched hands, go as far as possible. They grovelled smirkingly before a fat German, smiling benevolently, but with eyes of steel, who was the proprietor of the establishment. Most of the women were elderly, but their grey hairs had brought them no vestige of dignity or detachment, and Frances, seeing them thus, had prayed fervently to perish in the days of her youth rather than grow old to mouth and chatter over broken meats under the imminent shadow, within close hail of the peremptory voice, of death.

The vision haunted her. She pressed her fingers upon her eyelids until she saw green and scarlet circles, flashes and dots. And then a strange dizziness came over her, and, at the same time, a mad desire to escape from all the trammels of her life into some freer, braver air, into spacious chambers

looking upon cool fields and beautiful mountains. To weep, to cry out, to protest passionately—once only—how that would have cleared the atmosphere of her soul! But she had herself well in hand; for the flat was small, no sound but penetrated to its utmost corner, and there was, as she told herself with bitter frankness, no place for her to cry. Would this unnatural repression revenge itself upon her some day? So far there had been no opportunity. There were, in her existence, few intervals of repose in which her passionate soul might have gained strength for an outburst. Its energy was broken by a continuous clatter of petty incidents.

Art had become her refuge. As a little girl she had read the sound, old books in her father's small library. Others, too, which were not fit for a child, and whose meaning (their incidents and sayings clinging to her memory) had gradually unfolded itself to her as the years went on. Then the more quiet volumes ceased to bite into her mind, ceased to wrap her with a satisfying completeness from the sordid hideousness about her. Thus, driven by a great need, she had come into contact with a good deal of verse and prose that taught her something of the more exquisite and morbid possibilities of

life, and communicated to her senses an uneasiness of whose nature she was not wholly ignorant. . . .

Frances took her hands from her eyes and saw that it was quite dark. She hurried to her little room to dress. There seemed too little difference between the frock which she discarded and the one she would wear, but, quite mechanically, from the habit of avoiding discussion, she obeyed her mother's command. She felt a little resentful against her father for introducing a visitor; she might have spent the evening over some absorbing book, and the young men whom he occasionally brought to their table had never interested her. They were, as a rule, young medical students, unformed, uncouth, given to talking shop, and obviously afraid of her. Ware, she knew, was an older man, and of a different type. He had drifted, idly curious, or seeking new sensations, into the medical school in which her father held a small demonstratorship; he repudiated, she understood, the supposition that he would practise any profession. He had a moderate competence and dabbled in literature. Such a guest might, in a more hopeful mood, have been welcome. But the last few days of rain and humidity had, with their consequent discomfort, brought out the full acerbity of

her mother's temper, had prevented her from wandering into the quietude of Morningside Park, and had worn her nervous endurance to a shred. She could conceive of nothing that was not weary and unprofitable.

When she had dressed she lingered yet a brief while in her room. She pressed her forehead against the cool window-pane, and saw, since the flat was on the fifth floor, a rag of sky between the tall houses. The clouds had parted and a friendly star shone down upon her. It moved her immensely, so white it was, so benign, so different from the turbulent inner fever of her life. She welcomed it as an omen of fair fortune. Somewhere, somehow, she too would find her little portion of serenity and joy. With inarticulate thankfulness and supplication she turned her soul, for a moment, to God. Her deep and abiding sense of eternal things found no other expression than this. She had been brought up in no definite form of faith, and often turned with a vague desire to the Church and its visible symbols. But the conditions of her life made an active affiliation with any body of believers all but impossible, nor would her pride have suffered her to bear the vague patronage which would have been, in the majority of churches,

her inevitable portion. Such momentary communions, however, with a Power upon which the spirit might lean often changed her mood. A star, a flower, the waving of a leaf in the wind, a slender poplar against the evening sky—at the exquisite stir of such appearances she felt the sustaining and fortifying presence of God.

When she entered the dining-room her heart was lighter. The table, bright with immaculate linen and a little good silver and china, pleased her. It was a great pity, she reflected, that the room was so absurdly small that their guest would be practically barricaded in his seat. She brought a few flowers from her own room and put them in a slender vase on the dining-table. It was now time for her father and Mr. Ware to come. The process of waiting induced in her, as it always did, a slight but steadily increasing nervousness. She felt herself grow a little pale and went to the window of the drawing-room to look out into the street. The lamp-light shimmered upon the pavement, which, still wet from the recent rain, mirrored the rare passers-by in a phantastic reversal of their natural positions. Vaguely superstitious, she refrained from looking out any longer, with a sense that at her show of impatience those whom she awaited

would be delayed. She looked into the kitchen, but her mother had gone to dress. On crossing the tiny hall she heard the trill of the downstairs bell and hurried back to the kitchen to press the button that opened the door below. Her heart beat fast as she heard heavy steps upon the stair, and, in a moment, her father's clear voice bidding Mr. Ware to enter.

The two men came into the drawing-room, which they seemed to fill. Dr. Garnett was tall; his vivid blue eyes and white hair and beard were conspicuous. Ware looked shorter than he was by reason of his breadth of figure and heaviness of movement. It seemed to Frances that his features, settled in a somewhat sluggish repose, might flare up into supreme intelligence. He was homely, beyond doubt, dark and awkward, but there was a signal of flame in his half-shut eyes. She abandoned her observation under fire of her father's cheery talk.

"This is my daughter Frances, Ware. You two ought to get along well. You have many—I may say, nearly all—interests in common. You haven't had a pleasant day, have you, Fanny? No; the weather has been wretched."

He became aware of the young people's silence and stopped in some embarrassment.

"You will excuse me for the moment," he said. "I must get rid of some of the evidences of the day's toil."

A faint smile at her father's facile magniloquence seemed to mark the beginning of a less constrained attitude. Frances faced the young man.

"I'm afraid papa forgot to offer you a chair."

He sat down, bending forward a little and folding his hands between his knees. There seemed to Frances something pathetic in this strong man, gifted, she had been told, with unusual powers of speech, struggling, so evidently, after utterance. His voice, when he spoke, had in it a lyric note, a chanting cadence, resonant and unaffected. It interested her at once, as did the curious directness of his speech.

"I am very glad that Dr. Garnett permitted me to come and that I see you at last."

"At last?" She was quite willing to help him.

"Your father is very proud of you."

She noted, as once before, his faint, reluctant smile.

"Ah, yes, papa talks of me, no doubt. But you must not pitch your expectations too high."

"I was interested," he said slowly, "because your father told me of your caring for certain books

and certain things which, frankly, women as a rule disregard completely."

"Oh, I read. What else is one to do?"

"No, don't put me off, please,"—the words sounded very nearly morose—"I'm incapable of small-talk."

She laughed a little, and, with a characteristic gesture, joined her hands upon her heavy hair. The light shone full upon her: upon her changeful grey eyes, her fair cheeks slightly flushed, the full, rich moulding of her chin and lips. The loose sleeves fell back, leaving her round, warm arms bare almost to the shoulder. She saw his lids open wide and his eyes fixed upon her with startling intensity. A little shiver passed over her; she dropped her arms, and heard, with distinct relief, her father and mother approach the drawing-room. They moved in a few minutes to the dining-room, where the conversation became general. Ware hardly looked at Frances, but addressed himself with almost tactless persistence to her parents. She divined his confusion and was not aggrieved. The talk seemed to her not very illuminating, until, in discussing a recent play, she heard Ware's voice gather earnestness.

"The whole plot," he was saying, "hinges upon

a very noxious absurdity. Through the traditions of chivalry a good deal of brutal injustice has come into the world. It is firmly held that if a woman of the gentler class grants a man the slightest favour she has thereby come into possession of him, body and soul, forever; she can take his life and, if she will, ruin it. And yet, unless she is a child or an idiot, she stands upon precisely the same basis with the man, who asserts no such right. He does not demand possession of her, however he may desire it. She demands it, having really given nothing that the man has not also given. The bargain is too unequal."

"But would she grant any favour, would she have committed herself in any given case at all," asked Dr. Garnett, "except upon the tacit agreement that the action gives her certain rights?"

"Certainly, she would. For it is life itself that compels her, even as it compels us!"

Mrs. Garnett looked at Frances anxiously. The turn of the conversation seemed to her an unsuitable one. She had always opposed her husband's frank discussions of life with their daughter, his insistence upon the sanity that springs from knowledge. She gave the signal that dinner was over,

arose, and led the way through the narrow hall to the front of the flat.

Ware, with a sensitiveness that at once pleased and annoyed Frances, had read her mother's involuntary rebuke. He grew silent and ill at ease. They had lingered late over their meal and the end of the evening became flat and empty. Dr. Garnett talked alertly and well, but Ware was not again to be betrayed into definite speech. Shortly after ten he arose to go.

"I am not often at leisure in the evening," he said to Mrs. Garnett, "but if I might sometimes call on you and Miss Garnett earlier in the day, I should be glad."

Mrs. Garnett was exuberant in her friendliness.

"Do come," she said; "Fanny is often dull. We haven't many visitors."

Frances blushed at her mother's vulgar opportunism and hardly touched the hand that Ware held out.

When, presently, she had gone to her room for the night, she found herself regretting that she had not been kinder to him at the last moment. He interested her and she knew that she wanted him to come again. She did not put this desire into words, unaccustomed yet to violate a final feminine reti-

cence, even to herself. But she would have liked to feel another pressure of his strong, soft palm. Slowly she undressed herself and passed her hand gently over the delicate surface of her throat and arms. Her own body appealed to her as it had rarely done before; its smooth whiteness gave her an indefinite pleasure. Involuntarily arose the thought of Ware. She turned out the light hurriedly and crept, shivering, between the cool sheets of her bed. Sleep came soon, but not before a half-dreamy glimpse had been hers, a glimpse of some faint vision of a richer life, and of a gradual preparation for new fortunes under strange stars.

II

WEEKS passed and Ware called often. Mrs. Garnett speculated volubly as to his motives. Then suddenly his visits ceased and Frances felt the brief glow of expectancy fading from her. The leaves in Morningside Park were shrivelling and losing colour, the poplars looked peaked and thin, and the dimness of Autumn crept gradually into her soul. She was often dizzy and tired, but the weather touched her with an immense poignancy of sadness and aroused in her a new and indescribable yearning. Every vista seemed to her to lead straight into some unattainable Paradise. She could not look up Amsterdam Avenue, rising here with so generous a sweep into the light, without tears. Her thoughts were not consciously concerned with Ware, but at the vaguest resemblance to him in any figure on the street she flushed hotly and seemed to feel her eyelids quiver. Passionate and melancholy books were revealed to her with a new intensity and plangent verses wove themselves into

the shifting patterns of her waking dreams. Considering some of these dreams in an hour of detachment, she accused herself almost of vulgarity—so full were they of gorgeous places and of impassioned sounds. But, to escape from reality, she always abandoned herself to them again.

There was so much to escape from! The weary rattle of the little household seemed to grind more heavily along; the common meals passed in silence, broken only by her mother's shrill complaints.

"Fanny makes no attempt to help me; she hardly speaks to me."

Dr. Garnett looked at his daughter, who seemed inordinately moved.

"What is it, child?"

"I don't know, papa; perhaps I'm not quite well. My heart beats so."

He observed her furtively during the rest of the meal. Later, alone with her in the drawing-room, he suddenly laid aside his book. His blue eyes were almost stern.

"We must bear our burdens with a gentler spirit, my daughter."

"Ah, if there were something to bear! Something definite and worth while!"

"Those are the crude dreams of youth, child.

We are not here to solace victorious knights or immolate ourselves on the altar of genius. God has appointed as our portion, patience without reward."

Frances sat silent and disturbed. She had never before heard her father speak such words. His attitude to her had always been one of bright and comradely kindness.

"Patience?" she asked.

"Yes; and in your case, patience with your mother. If she is embittered it is not without reason, and neither you nor I have been guiltless, perhaps. Child, child, the least we can do is to be kind!"

She came to him and put her arms around him.

"I try," she said; "you mustn't doubt that. I have thought of all these things, and I think I understand. But lately it has been, oh, peculiarly hard!"

They looked steadily into each other's eyes. Then Frances hid her face. It was almost the first time she had ever done so; her manners were not of the facile, girlish kind. Dr. Garnett was pale and grave.

"I am a physician, my daughter,"—the words came with an effort—"and I speak as one. I have always feared the results of your temperament. I

know that you suffer, dear; that you will suffer still more keenly as you become more aware of yourself. There is no relief except in earnest and steady occupation."

She stood before him, strong and unashamed.

"You say that there is no help except—to forget?"

"Yes, since we are speaking quite openly. You are not likely to marry."

"Why?"

"We are poor, child; we know hardly any one. We must accept the conditions of our life as we find them."

"So poverty robs a woman of everything—everything, even the most elemental necessities?"

Dr. Garnett played with a paper-knife that lay near him on the table.

"You put it brutally, child. I shouldn't have supposed a woman capable of giving words to that thought."

She came to him again. The sadness in his voice was terrible to her.

"Have I shocked you, papa? You see, I've lived so much alone, and read, and thought. . . . And now we have talked about these things so sud-

denly. . . . No; you mustn't think that I'm lacking in delicacy. But life is so difficult, isn't it?"

"I wish you didn't know that yet, my child."

He looked white and old and all her power of compassion was aroused.

"Truly, you must not worry about me, papa. I dare say I shall be all right. It's good to know, at all events."

They kissed each other good-night, but Frances, in her light and fevered sleep, was still conscious of her father's step pacing the drawing-room for many hours. When morning came, her head and eyes ached, and she put off her resolution to make a great difference in her life until the morrow.

She felt, immensely, the need of some discipline, of some interposition from without. Had she lived in some closed and definite social group, with specific standards that might demand from her any measure of true respect, or had she been—this was a recurrent thought—under the guidance of some Church, her path would have been less difficult. But she was unspeakably alone with her fevered brain and ineffective will and the unending irritations of her daily life. Was not God unjust in making her so different from others who lived in a similar environment? For, surely, it was unim-

aginable that many could quiver hourly and daily with these tortured sensibilities which every contact with the necessary routine of life seemed to violate. . . .

The deceptive approach of Autumn was followed by a space of Summer weather. A great and weary heat parched the earth. Night after night the parks were filled with poor folk who could find no rest in their dingy flats. Frances, too, felt smothered between the narrow walls of her room. Her heavy hair seemed to drag her down, and upon the increasing pallor of her face her luminous eyes and lips stood out vividly. She suffered often from a painful throbbing of the heart and temples and her good resolutions became impalpable wraiths which she could not touch or hold. Every afternoon she climbed the many steps of Morningside Park at One Hundred and Sixteenth Street and walked over to Riverside Drive past the airy portico of the Library of Columbia University. . . . There, sitting on a bench, she watched the dainty pleasure-craft upon the river, and let the cooler airs blow upon her. She was listless and unhappy. The interminable days and years before her—years, perhaps, of just such life as was hers now—appalled her. It was all so dim, so complete in its hopelessness. At

times she drifted into a vague resignation, but it was, she knew well enough, only an effect of the enervating weather.

In this languor the thought and image of Ware had become dimmer. She seemed almost to have forgotten him, when, upon an almost windless afternoon, he turned from the path and stood beside her bench. Almost before she saw him she had felt his presence, and gave him permission to sit down beside her. But it was he who finally spoke.

"I didn't think you would be in town during this hot weather."

"We scarcely ever go away."

"Why?"

He at once divined his own tactlessness and frowned.

"Because we cannot afford it."

He was anxious to dismiss the painful subject. Any allusion to money, especially the lack of it, hurt him acutely.

"I have not seen Dr. Garnett recently, or I would have known that you were here."

She hardly knew what to answer. She felt again the power of his presence, heard again the moving

note in his voice, but he was, as always, difficult to approach. Suddenly he turned to her.

"No; I haven't been telling you the truth. I was afraid to come back again."

"Afraid?"

"I hate to be compelled."

She laughed a little, scarcely daring to understand him.

"But ultimately," he continued, "I should have come."

In her barren life the event of Ware's confessed admiration loomed enormously. The very unusualness of such homage, its uniqueness, in fact, strengthened her self-distrust. She could not believe that she had understood him.

"Am I," she hesitated still, "am I such an alarming person?"

"Yes."

The word came with unmistakeable meaning. It was clearly impossible to turn him from his seriousness.

"You have immense vitality," he said, "curbed, repressed, but irresistible—like yourself!"

She still strove, weakly enough, and merely by instinct, to fend him off.

"A young lady in a book would be offended by that speech."

"Oh, yes, and in life, too. But you are not—a young lady."

He emphasised the odious words heavily.

"How do you know?"

He shook his head angrily. His sudden lapses into silence gave her a feeling of helplessness. She did not know what to do. In her inexperience she had not power to shape the situation, and, getting up, she announced that it was time for her to return home. They walked together towards Grant's Tomb, which, top-heavy and a little absurd, yet shone with a refreshing whiteness through the dusty foliage of the trees. Few words passed between them. They were aware of the immense attractiveness they had for each other and made effort after futile effort to get at each other's thoughts. But their natural reserve, and the very tremour of passion that ran through them, made approach doubly hard. Climbing a few steps in the park, he touched her thinly clad arm and dropped his own as though a living coal had seared his fingers. He was not a patient man, and the image of this woman had, somehow, got between him and the rest of the world. But he hated the common and the common-

place with a profound and irritable hatred, and the obvious words were excessively hard for him to utter. They came at last, with a certain fierceness, and yet, because he was conscious of their frequent facile usage, with formality.

"Frances, I love you."

She caught her breath.

"It sounds miserably banal, dear, but I've been in agony these past weeks. Have you thought of me at all?"

She thought the poor, despised words sweet beyond singing, and turned to him her deep, grey eyes. He understood. Then suddenly she felt weak again and dizzy, and, by a natural impulse, leaned upon him. He took her to a little bakery on Amsterdam Avenue and ordered tea. The tea was acrid and dark, but she had been very thirsty and felt better after drinking it. She saw fully for the first time his smile, which was bright and tender. With entire disregard of the frowsy girl who waited on them, he covered her hand, which was resting on the table, with his own.

"I don't believe," he said, "that you even know my name."

"I saw it on papa's list."

"Then say it!"

"Julian."

The word sounded infinitely strange to her. But at its sound the barrier of reserve and convention between them seemed to melt. She found herself, presently, talking to him with a new vivacity, of herself and her life. It was very wonderful to be able to speak of these intimate things to another who understood.

"So you live in a cage," he laughed. "I suspected it."

"And not even a glass one. I have no glimpses of what goes on outside."

"What will you do?"

"What can I do? I suppose I'm needed at home."

He frowned at this.

"We must break through these cramping pieties. Believe me, we help no one by losing our own lives completely."

"I have never reasoned it out," she said slowly. "I have felt the constraint and the misery, oh, so bitterly! And I always hoped that somehow a release would come—"

"And when it comes," he broke in, "will you accept it?"

"I don't know, I don't know. . . ."

They went down Amsterdam Avenue several blocks, then through Morningside Park towards One Hundred and Twenty-second Street, and thence to Eighth Avenue. Here the rattle of the Elevated Railroad made speech impossible. Frances stopped abruptly at her corner, and Julian, crushing her hands in his, said:

"You will hear from me soon!"

She just managed, with nervous haste, to slip into the house in time for dinner. At table her mother asked querulously where she had been all the afternoon, and she answered:

"In the Park."

Dr. Garnett saw a feverish light in his daughter's eyes, but determined not to harass her with useless questions. Upon all three fell a constrained silence which Frances had not the courage to break. By her answer to her mother's question, made in thoughtless haste, she seemed to have rendered any reference to her meeting with Ware impossible. . . . For, had she spoken of it now, her first answer would have seemed disingenuous. Not this alone compelled her silence, but also her passionate yearning to keep some little corner of her life her

very own, secure from prying and remark. The want of physical privacy under which she had suffered had reacted upon her whole attitude. She knew that her mother, given the chance, would speculate with sordid intentions upon her renewed acquaintance with Ware, and she wanted to keep that relation inviolate and inviolable.

After dinner she picked up an anthology of modern verse and turned its pages listlessly. Then suddenly, she came upon two lines that seemed to her graven in flaming letters upon the page and to detach themselves, soaringly, from the context:

“But surely it is something to have been
The best-belovèd for a little while. . . .”

All the pathos and beauty of life seemed to her to be enshrined forever in these simple words, its supreme glory, which, however brief, was yet worth dying for. Yes, renunciation would not be difficult if one had only known the goodliest things for a little while. But to renounce without having known, to be huddled away into the oblivious earth without the rapture of a single day! She saw herself, with morbid clearness of vision, lying in a bare coffin, and heard some pitiful stranger (for no

one of her own blood would be by) saying: "No man kissed these lips when they were red, or this bosom when it was white. . . ." She closed the book before her and went to bed carrying the words and their message securely in her heart.

III

FRANCES was vaguely troubled by the deceit which she had practised. A full sense of all the strange happenings that might come of it did not dawn upon her till a much later period, when its sting was softened by a clear perception of the fatality in all mortal things. She made out an admirable case for her action. By the almost involuntary omission of a few words she had preserved to herself part of her life, and had rendered it safe from vulgarity and exposure. And, after all, it might end soon. Then the dear memory (for it would be wonderfully dear) would at least be all her own. If it were to end soon! She was like one suffocating to whom, after one delicious gasp, air was again denied. It was a strange reflection to her, especially in looking back afterwards upon these early days, that she hardly asked herself whether she loved Julian Ware; and she inferred that a formal recognition of love was rarer than it seemed. For herself, she dwelt upon the memory of that

late afternoon when they had spoken together in the golden dusk, treasuring his words, his gestures, and remembering, with a swift exaltation, the thrill of his touch. He seemed always near her, strange and troubling: she gave herself to mystical delusions, believing at times that his thoughts haunted her with a palpable reality. . . .

She had to wait four interminable days before a note came from Ware. By a bit of good fortune she secured it before it had been seen, and went to her room to read it. Its wording frightened her: "I want to see you—I cannot tell how much—and I shall be—there, at the same hour. But I do not ask you to come!" She was glad that her mother never prepared a formal luncheon at home, but that each of them ate alone. The hours thereafter dragged wearily. Once or twice she called upon her pride, asking herself whether she should go. But she divined a hidden earnestness of purpose in Ware's note. Then, too, that horrible dizziness came upon her, the room reeled, and she was glad enough to escape into the spacious world.

She saw from afar his sturdy shoulders and large, expressive head. He had placed his hat beside him on the bench and the wind was lifting his dark, soft hair from his forehead. His smooth-

shaven face was turned away, but as she came nearer she saw his profile. The expression was tense and severe; the line that ran from nose to mouth deeply stamped. It was almost a forbidding sight, but she was not afraid. For the first time in her life she felt as though she were coming gladly home. A whirling leaf on the path caught his eyes which followed it. He turned, saw her and, coming toward her, took her hand. It was so sweet to be with him that she laughed a little.

"I'm afraid you're given to being cross."

"What a child you are, what a child!"

He stroked her hand.

"We're doing the maddest thing on earth, absolutely the maddest, and you trill like a lark."

She was a little hurt and vexed.

"Why is it so mad? And even if it were, should you tell me so?"

"I, of all people, should tell you. If I had the strength and the courage—unfortunately, I have neither—I would send you straight home. There's a good deal of love in the world that is safe and quiet and smooth. Safe and quiet and smooth people feel it. But I tell you that such passion as ours tears and breaks. We're going to hurt each other—perhaps to death."

Something in her flared up as at a call to battle.

"Would you care to be otherwise?"

"God forbid!"

In every nerve she felt the thrilling resonance of his voice, and they laughed together in the glad consciousness of their fatal strength.

For a minute he looked almost boyish, filled with the blithe spirit of adventure.

"How long do you dare to stay out?"

"Till half-past six."

"That doesn't give us much time. But we can take a walk. Do you know what a fine, romantic place New York is? I dare say not. But one should never tire of exploring it. It's hideous and lovely by turns, but always new and surprising. Wait, I'll show you—sweetheart, sweetheart!"

This was a new side of him, delightful to her beyond words. She lost herself in the gladness of his presence and protection. They walked over to Eighth Avenue and, amid the grind of traffic, but wrapt far above the hopeless meanness of the way, as far up as One Hundred and Thirty-fourth Street. Into this street they turned eastward, and Frances saw Julian's eyes sweep, in sombre fascination, the shabby flat-houses.

"What lives, what passions, what miseries must

abide here!" he said. "Think of all the drab little rooms and the men and women sitting or walking there, dreaming, yearning, toiling!"

He had taken her arm and pressed it. Their feet kept step rhythmically and his imaginative interest in this apparently so barren scene communicated itself to her. Presently they emerged from the press of houses and stood upon the hideous Madison Avenue Bridge that here spans the winding Harlem River. A film of cloud had swept over the sky, no breath of wind stirred, and they stood looking upon the grey scene about them. The wooden barges on the sullen river seemed absolutely moveless, the wharves and scattered houses devoid of life. It was all leaden, sordid, bare of any gleam of comeliness. But from river and barge, from muddy street and the creaking bridge on which they stood, arose a subtle spirit of melancholy quietude. They seemed to have entered some void, waste gathering-place of the shadows of life and death. Julian whispered:

"Do you not feel it?"

She answered him with a look.

"I've stood here," he went on, "for hours, in just such weather. And there the barges lay and

no man was to be seen." His voice grew deeper. "A river of forgetfulness."

But Frances was glad because she understood him so thoroughly, because she too had an almost morbid perception of the atmosphere of such scenes which had helped to shape the life of her soul.

They crossed the bridge and came upon a tangle of unpaved streets on which stood scattered wooden houses, gaunt in their isolation. Empty building lots filled with all manner of refuse formed the intervening spaces. But across these were vistas to distant woods and waters, to barren fields—all still and empty of life. Suddenly Julian stretched out his hand, and Frances, following its direction with her eyes, saw, standing alone upon a little hill, an oddly built and painted house which seemed to have been carried here bodily from some immemorial German farm-stead. Its conformation, its thatched roof, its blinking, leaded panes—all had an air of ancient peace and long habitation, as if, like its far prototypes, it had almost grown out of the storied earth on which it stood. And over it wheeled circle within circle of white pigeons.

"The place is quite deserted," said Julian. "I've been here often before. No one in the neighbourhood could tell me who built it, since it was here

before the streets were laid out, and all the present inhabitants of Mott Haven found it, picturesque and empty, as it is. Some of the window-panes are broken, so that it has become a vast pigeon house and the birds have increased enormously.

"I shall remember it," Frances almost whispered.

"So shall I, dear," he returned, "doubly now. And in the days to come when we have grown weary of each other—I shall come here and dream."

"You do not mean that."

He stripped the glove from her hand and kissed its warm palm, and each slim finger, long and close.

"Oh, my dear, my dear, I wish I and all things were different."

"Why?"

He did not answer her, but, pulling out his watch, said that it was time to start on the way back, since she must be at home at a certain hour. He seemed all at once sad and dispirited. A wave of pity and love rolled over her and she could have covered his tired eyes with kisses.

"Let me stay with you longer. It doesn't matter."

He drew away from her perceptibly.

"Won't the consequences be awkward?"

"I shall be glad to bear them."

He looked at her rather oddly, she thought, and for a minute she was frightened. Then his reassuring smile made his face luminous again.

"I don't believe you know what the consequences are. But you are dear and good. We must risk it. Shall we dine somewhere?"

"Why not?"

She loved him and she was reckless. She could not bear to let him go. The thought had come to her with a quivering pang that she knew nothing of his life and could form no idea of whither he would go after leaving her. And she wanted him. He must not, should not, go, and be at ease in the company of other men, or, perhaps, even women, while she sat at home and ate her heart out.

"Julian, you do not wish to get rid of me?"

"No, dearest; it was for your sake that I warned you."

But his voice seemed to her lacking in warmth, and during their ride back on the underground railroad she repeated her question almost in terror. He held her hand firmly in his and succeeded in convincing her. Then they fell silent and Frances blushed with shame at her absurd importunity. As a rule she was full of calm reasonableness, but the

experience of her past seemed of little avail in the mad sweetness and terror of these late events. She seemed to lose her faculty of sane thoughtfulness, and certain nobler instincts, too, were beginning to desert her. Thus she thought of her mother and father waiting for her in vain, scarce swallowing a mouthful of dinner in their anxiety, but pitifully trying to persuade each other that all was right. But though she was aware of the pathos of the vision it moved her little. To let Julian go to his own dwelling and his own friends, not to hear his voice or feel the warmth of his shoulder against hers—that alone seemed impossible.

They left the railroad at the high station of Manhattan Street and walked over towards One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. The dark had come and the street-lamps were flickering. They said little, but walked close together, almost hearing their blood run and their pulses beat. As they neared the more crowded thoroughfares they drew apart with a sudden consciousness of their passion. At the corner of Eighth Avenue Julian bought flowers from the vociferous boys who stood there with huge hampers—violets and roses and lilies-of-the-valley—and he filled Frances' hands with them till she asked him to desist, saying that she had more

now than she could carry. In the dimly lighted passage that leads into the West End restaurant he buried his face in the cool roses at her breast, in the red roses against her white throat.

"Frances, Frances, how I love you!"

They chose a table in the farthest corner of the pleasant, roofless hall, and Frances placed her flowers on it, while Julian ordered dinner. The scent of the flowers rose exquisitely between them. The whole atmosphere of the place, cool and clean, was delicious to them. Very few people had yet come to dine, so that in their corner, behind a spreading palm-tree, they experienced a new and intoxicating sense of intimacy. A low tinkle of glasses and crockery came from an apparently absurd distance. They were quite alone and, looking up, could see that the clouds of the afternoon were drifting away in the darkness and that the white stars were slowly coming out. Frances felt a new animation. She had often looked enviously into such pleasant places and had seen men and women sitting together in them. It was, no doubt, a very material form of pleasure, but it was material pleasure which, in the terrible barrenness of her life, she had thirsted after—something of the bright glitter of the world and its mad intoxication. Surely, her

life had been unimaginably grey and monotonous. She was only clutching her most elemental rights. Something of her content shone in her eyes, showed upon her half-parted lips, rose and fell in the motion of her rounded bosom. She heard with a new ring the lyric note in Julian's voice as he quoted:

"Life of life, thy lips enkindle
With their love the breath between them. . . ."

His hand was over hers and his eyes dwelt upon her with compelling power.

When, presently, they began to dine, the tension was relaxed, and during the meal they spoke of music, of books, and discovered, what each had divined, that their tastes were in satisfying harmony, that they could linger together over many identical lines and passages. He was surprised that she knew her Gautier and Swinburne without feminine reticence and hesitation, that she had even read some very modern verse and prose known in America to a mere handful of people. As at their first meeting, she said, laughing:

"What else was there to do?" And then she added, "Until you came. . . ."

With a pretty, hesitating pronunciation, she repeated to him that marvellous rhythmic chant of

Verlaine in which all that is sweet in life and evanescent, and all but ineffable, is told with immortal music:

"Le souvenir avec le crépuscule. . . ."

She confessed that she had never studied German, and he insisted energetically that she must, and spoke of Heine's lyrics with a fullness of knowledge and delicacy of understanding that made her very happy. It was delightful to feel that he exceeded her in learning and insight, that she could look up to him and be taught. She smiled to herself at this intensely feminine satisfaction, but she was not ashamed of it.

They lingered a short while over their coffee, Julian smoking numerous cigarettes and inhaling the smoke with avidity. The slender, gold-tipped cylinders pleased her and she thought his way of smoking at once graceful and manly. When they left the restaurant they found on One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street a dense and steady stream of people in the hot, clear night. They hastened eastward to Seventh Avenue and walked in the direction of Central Park.

Entering the park, they followed a sinuous path, crossed the rustic bridge over the Loch and were

soon lost in deep thickets. The trees were still in full foliage, though the leaves hung down, wilted and athirst. In the narrower paths the air quivered with heat and the large, lustrous stars seemed to hang aloft in a palpitating mist. The benches were all crowded, and the men and women upon them, enervated at once and set aflame by the heat, expressed themselves with a terrible frankness of passionate sound and gesture. They hardly heeded the casual passers-by. Frances felt unutterably weary, and Julian found a place for her after long searching, upon a projection of living rock. All was silent about them save for some low cry, now and then, from a neighbouring thicket. They leaned toward each other and Julian's arms was about her. She was in a delicious languor, as if she had died to all things but his presence and his love. He kissed her hands, her arms, her throat. She turned her head away, and he bent close and kissed her hair and the tawny nape of her neck above her low-cut dress, his hand following the soft curve of her shoulder. Then abruptly he asked her to turn around. She looked at him and saw that he was very pale.

"Dear," he said, "it is late."

"Is it?"

She had lost consciousness of time and of herself and of her whole past. With sudden amazement the thought came to her that she must go home, that her father and mother were probably watching for her or had started a search. Terror gripped her and Julian could hardly keep step with her as she walked. He was very quiet and strangely humble; she could not tell why.

"Are you very angry?" he asked.

"No, no; but I had forgotten—everything."

At the door of her house she turned to him as if for protection.

"Come soon, soon. . . ."

He walked away sadly.

She ran upstairs, and, with overwhelming relief, saw no light glimmer through the outer door of the flat. Touching the door, she found it unlatched, and slipped into the darkness and silence. As she passed through the little hall she heard her father deeply breathing as he slept. Had no one been surprised at her absence? Had no one cared? And the peace that reigned here smote upon her with a deeper terror than grief or anger could have done.

IV

THE night was a fearful one to Frances. Her restless sleep was broken by monstrous dreams, evil faces leered at her, and the forms of her mother and father assumed the terror of avenging angels. She had to get up many times to dry the perspiration upon all her limbs. And then she would fall anew into a light sleep and be tossed about by fevered dreams. When the strange light of dawn filtered into the dreary air-shaft she grew suddenly cold in anticipation of the coming day. She sat down by the window in her loose night-gown and agonised for a moment—if but a moment—of calm consideration in which to smooth out the horrible confusion in her brain. If she thought of Julian at all, it was with a distinct feeling of repulsion. She only knew that she was in some frightful danger, that she was afraid of the heart-sickening scenes of explanation and reproach that would follow, as an animal is afraid of the lash. She had once seen a little dog cringe, with

trembling flesh and the anguish of extreme terror in its eyes, under a dressing-table. She knew now what had racked the animal's nature. Worse than all else would be the wretched futility of making a scene with her, for she was beyond such help as her father or her mother could give. She could not return to the unrelieved drab of other days, which seemed in retrospect of unimaginable hideousness: she must fight her fight alone. Despite her terror and a grim physical wretchedness, there was no real blindness in the girl's soul. She knew that her brief repulsion to Julian would fade and that she would not resist the inevitable. Her inexperience made it impossible for her to speculate upon the future. That was dark. But the insistent cry of her troubled heart was that she wanted to be left alone—alone, since no one in all the world could give her help and comfort.

When she was dressing she saw the dead paleness of her face in the mirror. She was not given to weeping, but the sight, somehow, brought tears which burned her eyelids. She tried hard to compose herself, and then, with final resolution, slipped into the kitchen. Mrs. Garnett was facing the window, and Frances came up behind her.

"Mamma. . . ."



Mrs. Garnett's voice was curiously cold.

"Your father sent a telegram yesterday to tell us that he would be detained down-town. He came in about ten and I told him you were in your room. I lied for you."

"Why?"

Mrs. Garnett turned around slowly.

"You don't know your father."

Frances was thoroughly confused.

"I know it was—unusual for me to stay out late, but papa would have been kind."

"Hush!"

Dr. Garnett came from his room. He asked whether breakfast was ready, saying that he needed to be off as soon as practicable. Then the three gathered around the table and Dr. Garnett spoke of a faculty meeting that he had attended the previous evening. He looked sharply at Frances.

"You look pale, child."

His voice was very kind, and Frances felt like crying.

"I'm not very well, papa."

"I think it is merely the heat," he said. "It has been very trying. Keep as still as possible."

He kissed her and her mother, lit a cigar and hurried off.

Frances felt a tightening in her throat. The punishment was at hand. She saw a gleam of unusual intelligence in her mother's eyes.

"I think I know what kept you out, Fanny, and it's hard to have a new anxiety added to all I bear. Do you know what's going to be the end of this? Just shame and misery, shame and misery! But I don't want to see you turned out of the house, and men can be so hard, so hard!"

"Papa would never desert me," Frances protested.

Mrs. Garnett broke down. The difficult tears of age rolled grotesquely down her shrivelled cheeks.

"Hasn't your father kept us in poverty and dirt all these years on account of what he calls his convictions? Don't you know that he might be rich and well known to-day but for his stubborn ideas? He has sacrificed us to them, and he thinks we ought to bear it all without complaining. He is hard, hard!"

"I have never found him so."

"Do you think I am telling you what is untrue?"

"No, mamma, no."

"When we were first married I used to complain of many things, because, you see, we were even poorer then than now. He would not listen to me.

He used to say: 'We don't need to be respectable, only self-respecting.' That's a man's idea!" Her voice rose in shrill contempt. "So I stopped talking and I'm a miserable drudge in my old age. I was as pretty and as fresh-looking as you are. *He* never noticed how my face got wrinkled; *he* never cared whether my hands were burned at the stove or callous with sweeping. He remained true to his convictions. Oh, my God, how I hate that word! I tell you, men have no pity, no regard for others, and if he thought that you had wantonly dishonoured yourself and him, he would turn you out into the street!"

She laid her grey head upon the table in an agony of bitter sobs. Her whole being had been set on worldly splendour; she had no other interests, no other hopes, and she had married an eccentric man of science, whose every thought and ambition thwarted hers. Frances put her arms over the shaking shoulders and the two women wept together over the pitilessness of life.

"Dear mamma, I promise you I'll take care of myself. Don't cry so, dear, don't cry."

Mrs. Garnett got up. She had dried her tears with a corner of her apron and started towards the

kitchen. At the door of the room she turned back and looked upon Frances, not without tenderness.

"Believe me, Fanny, it's useless to struggle. I have no time to think things out and I'm not clever, I suppose, but life is stronger than we are—always."

Frances went about wiping dust from the furnishings. They looked so forlorn in their shabbiness that it seemed almost merciful to let the grey film be their covering. This thought, she knew, would never have occurred to her mother, who wandered continually from room to room, drawing her finger over wood or plush to see whether a dust-mark would remain. At first the girl's movements were of nervous energy and eager haste; but when she came to the window-sill, and, leaning out, saw the tall poplars on Morningside Heights tremble and sway in the wind, the dust-cloth fell from her hand, she slipped down on her knees and rested her forehead against the wooden ledge. Beyond those fragile, swaying trees, under that blue sky which seemed to grow wan and far above the crowded city streets, beyond those airy heights, there flowed the broad, fair river, there the breezes blew light and fine, there she had known a dear and imperishable hour. It was over, of course, as she might

have known. What gracious thing had ever come into her life? A hot regret burned in her heart, a fierce and indomitable Will to Live. She recognised the violence of her emotions and tried to pray. But no sense of peace entered her soul, rather a stern and forbidding vision. She thought of the Saviour, not in His human and appealing guise, walking with poor and simple folk upon the Galilean hills, but as she had seen Him pictured in some ancient German wood-cut, pallid, emaciated, crowned with thorns, but in His eyes a severity born of other worlds, upon His lips a cry of woe upon the sins of earth and the flesh and a command to renounce, to abandon, to follow over dark, unhuman paths into a sunless realm of peace! To Frances' fevered mind the vision was real and almost palpable. Revolt surged up in her. She did not want to renounce, to die unto the world, but to live, to enjoy, to love. Into her heart floated the luring sweetness of those lines:

"But surely it is something to have been
The best-belovèd for a little while . . ."

and the tension of her nerves relaxed. She wanted to lie down in tall, cool grasses, under a sunny sky,

to be kissed and crooned over and to wreath the poppies of the field in her hair.

She had kneeled by the window so long that her knees began to ache violently. She became aware of the pain, little by little, and got up lamely. The fervour had left her. There was nothing to do, nothing to hope. Hour crept after weary hour in barren desolation. She tried to read, but books seemed faint and inadequate after the poignant living of the last few weeks. No words could ever render for her again the extreme sweetness of love or the full bitterness of life. At last the day faded into evening and evening into night. Dr. Garnett was once more detained down-town, and Frances went early to bed.

Towards noon of the next day she saw Ware slowly pacing before the house. The sight of him was like an imperious call—irresistibly strong. She put on her hat with such trembling fingers that the long bodkin pierced her skin. But she scarcely felt the pain, and was downstairs and beside him in a moment. He seemed gloomy and ill at ease.

"I was debating," he said, "whether to come to you."

"You should not come unless you care—really."

"Oh, I care. God only knows how much. But what is to be the end of all this? I cannot ever—"

She interrupted him with energy.

"If you knew, if you only knew how it sickens me to hear this constant weighing of consequences. So far as I can see, everything in life leads to wretchedness at last. We might as well take the good things that come to us without so much anxiety. They're few enough!"

He stopped abruptly, looking at her.

"Have you loved any man before me?"

"Never."

"And how old are you?"

"Twenty-four."

"Good heavens, child; where did you learn that wretchedness is the end of all things?"

"At home, I suppose."

She pressed her hand to her bosom with a plaintive gesture.

"I'm so tired, Julian, so tired—not physically, I mean, but at heart. Take me with you for a little while. But I must be home in time for dinner. Promise me that you'll let me go."

"I promise," he said gravely.

They passed on their way many bright and polished shop-windows, and Frances found herself

frankly delighted with the neat wares displayed. There was no shadow of desire in the pleasure she could take in such things. She thought that she had not been so simply happy for a long time. It was surely quite innocent, she told herself, to take a walk with Julian in the clear day-light, and her life was so empty of pleasures that it would be a mere sullenness of asceticism to deny herself this one. She laughed and talked gaily beyond her wont, and crunched with her small, white teeth the confectious that Julian bought her. But he would not share her blitheness, and at last she grew discouraged.

"What is it—dear?"

She used the word for the first time with tremulous reluctance.

"Nothing, nothing, after all. 'Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.'"

But long before it was necessary he turned back, and Frances tortured herself with self-questionings. Had she struck some discordant note in their relation? Had she done some subtle outrage to his mood? During the long hours it came to her gradually how she had centred her life upon him and the knowledge made her afraid. A storm of rain rattled against her window and she was appalled at


the prospect of a long, lonely day, during which her nerves would twitch in horrible pain at every ring of the door-bell. She was powerless to act and must await his coming and his mood; she was entering upon her heritage, the heritage of all women, as literally now as in the folds of the primæval hills—waiting and sorrow. It was most piteous to her to think of the weary eyelids, the fevered hands, the impassioned hearts of all her innumerable sisters who, in the endless ages, had wept and waited.

Morning came, however, with a clean-washed sky and a red splendour of autumnal sunshine. The air was cool and clear and luminous, the very streets seemed transfigured out of their sordid homeliness, and Frances felt her mood change suddenly. On so golden a day some delightful thing must surely come to pass; it was incredible that the world should hold no bit of happiness for her, who, after all, asked for so little! Nor was she disappointed. Julian met her early. He seemed to have cast from him some heavy burden, to have deliberately turned his face to the light.

Upon this day and those which immediately followed they were like two happy children. They wandered through streets that seemed to them of

a delicious quaintness; they came suddenly upon little views of field or wood or river that enchanted them with unexpected loveliness, and so seemed, in some sweet and intimate way, to become their own. Then they would drink tea in obscure and shabby little baker-shops, and each of those places became to them a home of romance and a haunting-place of dreams. It was a time to them, not of rapture, but of contentment. They tasted of the lighter and more delicate poetry of love. He would put his arm around her as she stood leaning over some stone parapet, looking down upon the smiling river, and just where her hair ended in a little wilderness of curls kiss her warm, white neck. And then, to punish him, she would drop his hat, which she held in her hand, upon the sloping greensward of the river-bank. They were like two children whose play was touched with passion. Fate kept her cruel counsels upon these delicious afternoons; and they themselves resolutely turned their faces from the lurking beasts in the jungle of days to come.

At length the days grew chill and the dark came early. It was no longer so pleasant to wander aimlessly through street and park, and often sharp showers overtook them. The choice of a suitable shelter became increasingly difficult.



Julian was fond of lounging in restaurants over black coffee and cigarettes, but Frances felt something that weighed heavily upon her spirit in the large, deserted restaurant halls of the afternoon hours with a single, unkempt waiter, who shuffled slowly about and watched them with sleepy eyes. She began to wonder why, after all, she might not ask Julian to visit her in her home, but since he did not suggest such an action her natural reserve would not permit her to speak of it. They drifted about somewhat uneasily, until one afternoon Julian announced that they were going to an early vaudeville performance. Frances hesitatingly objected to the publicity of a crowded theatre, but he assured her that they would be nowhere else more entirely alone.

The theatre was dimly lit when they entered and Frances had a haunting sense of the morbidness of shutting oneself in with artificial light when the clear day shone without. Thus the whole scene assumed to her at once a subtle unreality. A close-packed crowd surrounded them, and from it seemed to pass an infectious quiver of restless human nerves. In order to avoid contact with a short, red-haired man who sat at her left she had to press close to Julian, so that they felt continually the

troubling warmth of each other's bodies. Julian bent down suddenly as if in search of something and she felt his lips burningly upon her wrist. When he raised his head the performance began. So imperious had grown the excitement of her senses that Frances saw the performers on the stage through a dreamy film. She seemed to herself to have passed into a strange phantasmagoria whence all life was excluded except the desires of the body. Before her eyes flashed the white arms and bosoms of the actresses. And every allusion in song or monologue seemed to dwell with an insistence, which at last became cruel, upon passionate allurements. She felt hot and wretched and ashamed. She wanted to tear herself loose from all that, to escape into the fresh and strengthening air.

"Julian, I'm—ill. Please take me away."

He led her out and she saw with a great relief the light of day at the far end of the entrance passage.

"It was rather a bore, wasn't it?" he asked.

"It was dreadful!"

"Hardly that, dear; only quite ordinary and absurd."

She told him that she preferred to go home at

once and rest and he consented wearily. There was really no place for them to go and they parted almost coldly at her door.

When Frances went upstairs, nearly two hours earlier than usual, she found her mother at the drawing-room window, wringing her hands in a distress that seemed not entirely sincere, but theatrical and calculated.

"Why doesn't he ever come upstairs?"

Frances, taken unawares, flushed hotly.

"I don't know."

"Has he asked you to marry him?"

"Mamma!"

"So he hasn't! Well, well, what then—?"

Mrs. Garnett laid her heavy hands on Frances' shoulders.

"What then?" she cried.

Frances regarded her mother calmly.

"I warned you, but you went straight on. Now you've thrown yourself away on the first comer, and what will it lead to? Do you know where such doings end? In the streets—in the streets! Oh, my God, my God!"

"Not that, mamma, not that!"

A heavy silence fell upon the room. Only from time to time resounded Mrs. Garnett's desperate

sobs which she seemed to tear from the roots of her being with conscious violence. Frances' throat seemed to burn like living fire. It seemed to her as if she would never be able to speak again. Her mother had brought before her with vivid brutality the thoughts that she had put from her day after day in order to secure for her soul a brief, if merciless, happiness. At last the silence grew so ominous, the obscurity so deep, pierced only by a faint yellow glare from a street-lamp far below, that Frances could endure the tension no longer.

"Mamma, mamma, I swear to you, you are wrong!"

Mrs. Garnett rose from the sofa on which she had thrown herself.

"See that he marries you—and soon! Otherwise—"

She spread out her hands with a last despairing gesture and went out of the room.

V

MRS. GARNETT carefully concealed from her husband the attitude of almost intolerable constraint in which she and her daughter lived. The two women moved silently about the flat, involuntarily spying upon each other, and passionately eager to detect, mood by mood, each other's thoughts and emotions. In Dr. Garnett's presence, at meals and during the few hours after dinner, they played for his benefit, and by a silent compact, a sufficiently adroit game of unbroken intimacy. His coming was more than ever a relief to Frances. During the long periods of his absence she felt as if invisible fetters of dragging weight hung upon all her limbs. Mrs. Garnett seemed to watch her so closely that her most natural moods became constrained and awkward in their expression. She strove to make her very breathing inaudible. It was not that she was lacking in courage, but her deep-seated social instinct taught her how really indefensible her position would be thought, and how

near she had actually been, at least once, to that irrevocable catastrophe which her mother had feared.

But she had hours of maddening intellectual confusion, when all clarity of thought seemed to slip from her, when it was not even necessary, as in the days before, definitely to repulse a tendency to weigh consequences—hours in which her soul and her body cried out in agony after a new life, and all that she had been taught as right and honourable became to her, beyond measure, mean and repulsive. She no longer felt the weightiness of that inexorable maxim of bourgeois poverty, that when a woman has lost her chastity she has lost her whole life, since she can retrieve herself neither by a bold independence of revolt nor by a marriage with another man. These convictions that had impregnated the very air she breathed became unreal and mere barren words. In the storm of her desires for love, for light, for freedom—rectitude and piety, as she had known them, floated afar, phantasmal delusions, into the distance of dreams.

Out of this wrack rose luminous moments in which she felt that a great change had been wrought in her since she had known Ware. Deeply as she had suffered before under the repressions of her life, she had rarely doubted that these re-

pressions were practised in the service of an essential righteousness. She had rebelled against a thousand details of her life, against fate for placing her amid such sordid and unhappy conditions. But she had tacitly accepted the laws of that life as binding. Ware had awakened in her all elemental needs—all that is crushed by reckless disregard in middle-class society—and at the moment when she had asked her father whether poverty means even the denial of passion, she had begun to look, consciously and tacitly, upon that as good which in her class and station was the supreme evil.

Gradually, under the influence of this recognition of her changed attitude, the confusion of her mind passed away. The whole process was rapid, since it was merely a crystallisation, under the stress of a sudden recoil, of the fluid emotions of the past weeks. She now felt with impassioned anger the wrong that life had done her and more and more the troubling constraint that had oppressed her in her mother's presence. Her mother had, to be sure, been almost violently solicitous that she should have decent apparel, that the dentist should look after her teeth. But the very bread of life, without which existence was a blunder and a shame—this was denied her, except under a set of highly arti-

ficial and not always attainable conditions. She could have laughed in contempt of her past self, so blind had been her desires, so unfortified by her new sense of their sanity and justice. Nevertheless, she intended that Julian should marry her, and at the thought of his deep-rooted detestation of marriage as an institution her heart ached sharply. For a refusal on his part to marry her seemed to her a complete denial of the love he professed. Not for conventional reasons did she cling to the traditional form of union. No; but were his love real, must he not desire, above all things, to bind her to him by all the most irrevocable vows, must he not fear otherwise to lose her? Thus she imputed to him her own feminine conception of love. She desired ardently to possess and to be possessed—wholly and forever.

For more than ten days she had not seen him. First she had feared her mother's embittered violence, and after that a deep sense had restrained her that her struggle must be over before she could see him again, deeply as she yearned for his sight and touch; that she must wait until she had wrought from the turmoil of her soul some abiding clarity. She could not quite account for this to herself, nor for her reticence in the notes which, at his request,

she wrote him. His own letters were ardent and beautiful, but often ended with a harsh discord. And she connected these discords with that rough change of temper which she had noted in him, those sudden outbursts of what was almost discourtesy, and for the sake of which, strangely enough, she loved him the more dearly. Her soul loved him because he was often depressed; even when he was violent and harsh. She never resented these things, but in her inviolable womanliness was exquisitely sorry for him.

At last she could bear this separation no longer. She determined, however, with childlike joy and, for the time, complete unconsciousness of the significance of such a step, to surprise him by visiting him in his bachelor apartment. The superficial unconvictionality of the step—for this, though this alone, she recognised clearly—made it seem, in her present mood, only the more attractive. She dressed herself carefully in a close-fitting blue frock and a coquettish little hat of the same colour. The heavy strands of her brown hair were loosely knotted at the back of her neck. She liked it best so.

She had not a far distance to go, but the way became strangely difficult. It seemed to her that all

eyes must be upon her, and that the very loungers before the corner barrooms on Eighth Avenue laughed without mirth in suspicion of her unconventional errand. She tried to fortify herself against such folly; but, little by little, something of her first adventurous gladness passed away and she walked the last block almost in fear.


It was with extreme difficulty and in a voice hardly audible that she requested the pert mulatto in the entrance hall to telephone upstairs and find out whether Mr. Ware was at home. The answer came that he was, and she was carried up in the lift so rapidly that, for a moment, all things swam before her eyes.

Julian met her on the landing. He looked at once grave and troubled. He took her into his little drawing-room, furnished and decorated in rich tones of golden brown and lined with book-shelves to the ceiling. She held up her face to him timidly, but he seemed not to notice it. Then he turned to her almost savagely.

"Frances, why did you come here?"

"To surprise you. I thought you would be glad—yes, glad to see me."

Her voice was plaintive, but it seemed not to touch him. His own was cold and monotonous.



"I do not know," he said, "whether to think of you as very subtle or quite unsophisticated. Let me explain, however. You are what the newspapers would call a young lady of unblemished reputation. By coming here you compromise yourself very definitely. But that is not all—you compromise yourself for my sake."

Frances grasped clearly, for a moment, the monstrous accusation of his words. Then the room began to wheel around and she fell into a chair. She closed her eyes and felt her senses adjusting themselves again. She saw Julian walk up and down before her.

"I am quite conscious of the fact," he continued, "that what I say sounds inexcusably caddish. But society pushes off the whole ethical responsibility upon me. It can be assumed by me only if I marry you. Hence your coming here resolves itself into a conscious or unconscious attempt to force me to marry you. And I cannot render my love for you official and Philistine; I cannot enter upon a round of hideous and vulgar domesticities, and I cannot and will not perjure my soul with that monstrous and impossible oath to love you forever. I love you now: whether I will love you in ten years' time I do not know. No man can know of such things,

and no woman, either. Half the misery in the world springs from this contemptible folly of thinking that the finest and most evanescent emotions are as definite and unchanging as a cobbler's last."

He stopped in his walk and looked upon her. She was leaning back in the chair, her head slightly lifted. Her face was pale and blue rings had gathered under her eyes. Her beautiful hands lay wearily upon the arms of the chair. Julian came to her and knelt down beside her.

"Dear," he said, "I wish I were different—for your sake. But this thing is stronger than I. It has grown with my growth; it has strengthened with my strength. I have seen. . . ." He held his hand before his eyes as if to shut out the visible world and concentrate his soul upon visions within. Then he spoke again in a voice that was dry and even—a voice of colourless monotony, conscious of the fact that no emphasis would be adequate to mark the intensity of the emotions involved. "I have never told you about my father. He was a good man—gentle and strong and wise, a fine and distinct individuality. My own mother died early, and to him I owe all I am, all I shall ever be that is of good report. In his quiet, restrained way he cared deeply for the best things in

life and in literature and he taught me to care. We lived in comparative loneliness—apparently—but we had with us in constant companionship the voices of the enduring dead.” He arose and walked to the other end of the room. There he stood, facing her, and went on. “When I was sixteen my father married again. Just how it came about I hardly know. We couldn’t talk intimately—he and I—afterward. The woman was handsome, adroit from the world’s point of view—even, God help me, good-natured. They came back from a brief wedding-journey and she began . . . to set the house in order. The thing came upon my father unexpectedly, dazing him for a while. Then he arose in wrath and resisted . . . with his whole soul . . . with every nerve! But her legal rights were established; she was in possession. The woman declared our modest income beggarly; she wanted to put my father in harness. She broke in upon his quiet hours of work and brooding; she laughed at his scholarly repute. In society, in his presence, she spoke with a faint smile: ‘Bookworms! My dear, don’t marry a bookworm.’ She dragged him to routs and balls. He resisted, I have told you. How did that help him? The very effort to resist jarred his senses, destroyed his mood, slew the

higher faculties of his soul. He had no redress—none. Of what could he accuse her? His wrongs were of a subtlety that defied words—such words, above all, as might reach the coarse ears of the law. And so the battle went on, day after day, week after week, year after year. Gradually his habits were broken, his friends alienated, his work destroyed. Gradually, under the pressure of that intolerable persistence, he became old and had hours of weakness—weakness so utter that I have seen my father, whom I loved, cower . . . cower before the distant sound of a woman's voice, to whom a perverse law had tacitly given the right to rend, to destroy, to crush. He had, to the last, his moments of strength, when he fought for his ideals, for his failing work, for his mode of life. But he was not meant for such a conflict. It killed him. And the woman—the woman stood beside that grave in her impenetrable worldliness: 'Poor Mr. Ware! He was a good man, but so impractical—so unambitious!' " Julian clenched his hands. "She had the right; he was powerless. But I swore by his grave that I would never give a woman that right; not the best, not the noblest. If ever I know a moment of relenting I see that grave and I remember that hour when I saw my dear father—whom I knew

in his vigour—shrink with fear and a horror of repulsion in his eyes at the coming of a footfall and the sound of a voice!”

Once more he came to her, took her cold hands and pressed them against his cheek and forehead. She looked at him and saw the fire of those evil memories burning in his eyes. And suddenly she wondered vaguely what her own father would have been if her mother had added to desires the strength of will to carry them into action. Yes, she understood what he felt. But should not his love tell him that she was different . . . different? Could he believe evil of her? The bitterness of this thought rang in her speech.

“And should you grow tired of me, should I disappoint you, as I might, what would become of me?”

He let her hands go abruptly. An angry redness mounted into his forehead.

“Ah, that is just the attitude I hate—the ineradicable smallness of woman. Are we not in precisely the same position? Can you mortgage your very soul any more than I? If you were to cease to love me first, though it broke my heart and ruined my life, I would not inflict myself upon you. I would leave

you free to be happy. But no woman has that magnanimity!"

She flashed out for the first time.

"It is not magnanimity; it is heartlessness. No woman who truly loves a man would desert him. She would sacrifice herself for him to the very point of death!"

"But if he has ceased to love her he does not want her life—he wants his own."

"You do not understand."

"Only too well. I have seen it! Your love is merciless, your fidelity is implacable and your very unselfishness enslaves!"

She arose and stood before him, white and apparently calm.

"I am not concerned that you should marry me for conventional reasons. My life has not been very happy, and I might have borne shame and disgrace even—for the sake of love! But I am right; you do not love me."

"Why?"

"Because your only thought seems to be how—some day—to rid yourself of me."

"Frances, you are utterly unjust; it is a principle I fight for, a deep conviction."

She seemed to hear her poor mother's broken

voice: "But he remained true to his convictions! My God, how I hate that word!" She felt as if in the man before her some incomprehensible and sinister force was trying to crush and destroy her.

"I don't understand," she said; "I don't understand."

Then, slowly, she arose to go. He came nearer to her and nearer, and she let him put his arms about her. His lips sought hers and she could not resist. He kissed her eyes, her forehead, her hair.

"Dearest," he said, "you cannot go from me in anger. Can you not trust yourself to me without understanding?"

She shook her head.

"No—if only you loved me; if only you loved me . . .! Now all my struggle has been for nothing."

"I love you," he said firmly, "more than I should have thought possible. When you want me you shall find me at your bidding."

She freed herself gently from his grasp.


"Good-bye."

"Good-bye," he answered, and his voice shook.

They went into the hall and he rang the electric bell for the lift. While it was coming up it seemed to her that she saw in his eyes a plea for forgive-

ness, but she was dazed and worn out and stepped into the iron cage without a word. In a moment his face had disappeared.

The immense recuperative power of her youth abandoned her for almost the first time. Hitherto every disappointment had been accompanied by an immediate resurgence of the brighter forces of her soul, by a swift and involuntary struggle to readjust her spiritual vision to the new aspect of life and draw therefrom a better consolation. To-day, upon the windy, autumnal streets, she felt only the dull ache of utter defeat. She watched, with a strange curiosity, for that thin flame of hope to flicker, swiftly at first and tremulously, in her heart. All within her was dark and silent. But her physical sight seemed suddenly to have gained an acuteness that was akin to pain. The familiar details of the street scene on Eighth Avenue stood out with an unnatural clarity. Gradually one street-lamp after another burst through the gathering dusk, and with an instinctive sense of the passing of time Frances turned into a street that led to Manhattan Avenue. She passed a flaring saloon in the corner house and, through the half-open swing-door, saw a woman sitting at a small table. The woman was dressed in a stiff gown of yellow



silk; her short, crimped hair was of the same sharp, yellow hue, and her eyes seemed to Frances of the colour and hardness of amber. The sight fascinated her. It was of an evil gorgeousness, and to stare at it seemed to take her out of herself. But the woman saw her and, laughing, came to the door. Frances fled down the darker street with a new and overwhelming sense of her strange position. It came over her now with startling clearness. She had given up for the sake of love the measure of peace that had made her old life endurable, and had given it up in vain.

One thing was certain: she could not, at home, explain the real state of affairs. And this thought burned and hammered in her brain: he did not love her. Something in his eyes, something in his touch, of a great tenderness for her and a deep reverence—these impressions were graven upon her mind. But they were, to her way of thinking, utterly and shamefully belied by his words. He wanted her for a little while, and then would turn from her, and her face burned with shame at the thought. No; she could not explain. And since no possible explanation could convey the precise aspect of the truth, she reasoned that an utterly false one would really not be half so immoral. She tried, with fev-

erish anxiety, to frame a story, but failed. She could hardly loiter before the door to think of a plausible way by which to cover all the facts of her behaviour. And so she went slowly upstairs.

Mrs. Garnett, as was usual at this hour, pottered about the kitchen. Frances, with a sudden reckless inspiration, called to her mother. At all costs she must guard against questioning and discussion.

"Mamma," she said, "Mr. Ware asked me to marry him this afternoon—and I refused."

Mrs. Garnett's face became a crumpled mask of horror and surprise.

"Oh, you fool!" she cried. "You fool!"

"I don't believe," Frances continued, "that he really loves me. And I am quite sure now that I do not love him. We shall not see each other again."

Mrs. Garnett sat down and wrapped her apron over her wet hands.

"Very well," she said wearily. "You might have been rich and happy. Mr. Ware is a gentleman and a man of means. You will regret your foolish sentimentality to the last day of your life. But I've got to go back and get your father's dinner."

Frances went into her room and sat down. It hurt her fearfully now that she had lied so directly

and unblushingly. But what could she have done? A sense came to her of the stark poverty of the means of human communication, of the clumsiness and hardness of words. By what possible combination of them could she have told her mother the truth—Julian's apparent love and his strange refusal to marry her, and, stranger than all, his reasons for his refusal? She wept softly at last, pitying herself that she had not a single friend, no soul so close to her own that she could really speak. God seemed terribly far away and unreal, and, as often before, she thought with a warming of the heart of the veiled confessionals that she had seen in Catholic churches. But to her all sources of consolation were mercilessly closed.

VI

SEPTEMBER mornings came in with thick, milky mists. Then winds arose and swept the mists seaward and the wistful sweetness of Autumn hovered over the city. The soft grey of the sky was heavy with rain that rarely fell. From Morningside Park the children, the visitants of summer, had disappeared, and standing alone here upon some climbing path of the hillside, Frances felt swathed in elemental silence. Sometimes she would sit on a bench and by her absolute quiescence lure the shy, grey squirrels from their dripping coverts. She watched their bright, black eyes and trembling little snouts as they ventured nearer and nearer, coming, for a moment scarce perceptible, to sniff delicately her boot or skirt. One little fellow, bolder than the others, would perch, for some delicious seconds, on her shoulder, and brush her ear and neck with his soft fur. After that she brought bags of delectable peanuts for her pets, and it was a strange enough sight: the pale, red-lipped girl, her

brown hair sparkling with tiny, gemlike drops of moisture, alone in the autumnal woodland, and about her the troops of darting squirrels. She loved this retreat, for it became to her a bourne of forgetfulness. Here she could sit for hours and let her thoughts wave indolently about simple and natural things and not a sight or sound of the difficult world come to mar her peace. . . .

Mrs. Garnett, secure of the girl's truthfulness, did not interfere with her walks in the near park. But the hours consumed by these were, after all, few, and the mornings and evenings seemed often intolerably long. With a deep sense of the immense futility of life, Frances listlessly abandoned her music and her former studies. At times, indeed, she almost hated the arts, for were they not clamorous of life? The splendour of passion, the rapture of wine, the adventurousness of dim sails over the rim of the revolving earth—what had she to do with these? She pondered over the exceeding strangeness of the fate by which she had lost her hold upon the bright realities of life, but she could not unravel the inextricable strands. Being a woman, and of little worldly experience, she could not divine the nature of the motive that drove Julian to words and acts of seeming ruthlessness.

What, after all, could she know of that passion for independence, that fear, rising at times to the point of madness, that a woman might destroy his single-minded devotion to the ambitions that floated before him, might retard the fruits of his slow maturity? He had told her, often enough, of how he wore his heart out over the things he was trying to write, and she had listened with intelligent interest. She did not know that these halting attempts which he would never show her were the imperious rivals of his love. She brooded over that last scene with him. She felt the genuineness of his convictions—their genuineness; against their truth she rebelled. But in solemn hours of the night she confessed to her soul that she still loved him, and that nothing could cast him from her heart.

Her father's keen, blue eyes would often dwell upon her. He had never referred to their one frank discussion, and his various preoccupations made dim to his sight the conditions of his own home. But she was pale and listless and he was profoundly concerned for her. He would even return somewhat earlier in the evening in order to be with her, for he knew that his wife had no intellectual resources. But Frances often found it difficult

to respond to his efforts. Her thoughts were with her heart and that was far away.

At last one evening he broke the essential silence which surged over and beneath all their superficial talk.

"Frances, I believe you should have some diversions. I've never thought of it until recently, but I find it strange that you have no friends of your own sex and age."

"Don't you really know why, papa?"

"How should I?"

"Well, you and mamma denied yourselves many things to send me to an expensive school, and all the girls I knew there are either married or busy with sport and society. They have no time for one who does not and cannot share their interests."

Dr. Garnett frowned heavily.

"You know we acted for the best, my child."

"Of course I know it."

A shadow passed into his bright blue eyes. Any defection from duty, however unconscious, was a terrible thing to him.

"If only our income were a little larger," he said. "But it is too late in the day to consider that. I could not make any real change in your life with-

out sacrificing a portion of my life insurance, and that is out of the question."

"Quite," answered Frances, wearily.

A few days later he came home with an unusual eagerness in his manner.


"Fanny, I was introduced to Allendale, the painter, at luncheon to-day. He invited me to his Wednesday afternoon receptions and I told him I would send my daughter instead. Do go. I am not sure that the atmosphere there is quite desirable. But you are old enough not to be influenced. You may meet some interesting people. And, yes, I wanted to ask you: did Ware ever call? I quite lost sight of him, and I thought at one time he would be a pleasant friend for you."

"He never called, papa."

She was overwhelmed with the consciousness of the insinuated lie. And her father was so eagerly, if not skilfully, kind and thoughtful. She believed that, at this moment, she might confess to him. If only her voice would not tremble so.

"Papa—"

"My dear child, don't tell me you're not going. Your vitality seems low, and vigorous contact with people will be the best thing for you. You need



not be diffident. Allendale's functions are quite informal, and you can wear a street-suit."

Frances went to her room appalled at the small perversities of fate. . . .

On Wednesday afternoon Frances set out upon her quest. It was distinctly that; since Allendale lived in some far, green corner of the tangled Bronx. She did not promise herself any extraordinary pleasure from the afternoon, for it seemed to her that in social diversions, as in nearly all things, there must be, for full enjoyment, an element of the habitual. This excursion was to her an event so isolated that she would be, in comparison to the other guests, at an immense, though not easily definable disadvantage. She would know, though no one else might suspect it, that she had merely emerged, for the briefest space, from the drab waste of her life, to sink again at once. Was it worth while, then, to have a fleeting glance at a world, perhaps desirable, from which, after all, she would be excluded? Her motive in going was simply not to render quite futile her father's kindly efforts.

Wearied by her long ride in the underground railroad, she was glad, on leaving it at West Farms, of the large visible stretch of sky and the country-

like air of the place. She discovered presently that a tall, old mansion of wood, devoid of paint, but with an ample portico, was Mr. Allendale's. The house stood alone upon a little hill which Frances ascended by way of a foot-path hardly distinguishable among the reeds and bushes. There was no bell at the door, which stood open. But Frances, with eyes fresh from the sun, could distinguish nothing in the strangely fragrant gloom within. Disheartened by sudden diffidence, she thought of going away, when, apparently from nowhere, came a small, fat, blond man with both hands stretched out in unctuous greeting.

"This surely is Miss Garnett! I know the faithful who gather about me, and you are not one of them. Thus I recognised you. But you will be of us, I trust."

He was, she thought, excessively blond and fat, and his body seemed to be bloodless. His wide mouth writhed in the superabundant fullness of his face. He took her hand with odious familiarity and led her within.

All the inner partitions of the house had been removed, and the shell had become one large hall. All the windows were thickly draped, and the consequent darkness was lit only by tiny crimson lamps

that shed a flicker from deep niches in the wall. Where the red light fell, long divans could be faintly discerned and wooden stools in the grotesque forms of fabled monsters. Long, narrow pictures stood on easels near a few of the lamps—portraits of women with cruel eyes, voluptuous lips and thin, wasted breasts. Wherever one turned, smouldering joss-sticks sent forth delicate spirals of pale blue smoke that hung with sickening heaviness upon the air. And amid this astonishing farrago of Orientalism and decadence, clinked, if one approached them too nearly, rusty suits of armour, helmets and breast-plates. Allendale led Frances to a divan and sat down beside her. When he spoke he attempted to modulate his voice to a soft, insistent music and his enunciation was deliberate to the point of grotesqueness.

"You are early," he said; "and that is well. I must tell you that so soon as your father mentioned you, I was conscious of a mysterious sympathy between us. One must not search into these inscrutable phenomena, but dwell in them with faith."

He pressed her hand and seemed not to notice her silence.

"This house, as you perceive," he went on, "I have transformed into a real dwelling-place, have

shaped it to the needs of my spirit. I am so glad, so glad you have come. But now I must be ready for my other guests. Will you come with me?"

He preceded her to a huge screen, turned its corner, and here in the sudden and apparently fierce illumination of an undraped window, Frances saw a small, thin woman with bright red hair. She wore a gown of black which seemed to consist almost entirely of open-work, so that the woman's pale, thin arms and flat bosom were horribly visible. At a second glance, it was clear that she was the model of the strangely voluptuous portraits under the crimson lamps.

"This," Allendale murmured, with his softest intonation, "this is Miss Bertram. We have elected, for a space, to unite our lives. Valeria, this is Miss Frances Garnett."

Although her thoughts had in the past weeks dwelt with a serious liberality upon the question of marriage, Frances was appalled at this utter frankness. She was not sure that she would not have called it shamelessness and have been proud of this conceivably bourgeois attitude. She was entirely at a loss for words at this moment.

"Is not he wonderful?" Miss Bertram asked.

"Who?"

"Allendale. Is not he very, very wonderful?"

Frances wanted to laugh, but she looked into green eyes so solemn that she refrained.

"I have hardly known him long enough to decide," she said, with a smile.

"He is wonderful," repeated the woman in black, and her thin bosom laboured, "but also terrible. Strange things have gone to his making, strange things. . . ."

Beyond the screen arose a hum of conversation, and Miss Bertram, taking Frances by the arm with her claw-like hand, led her into the soft darkness of the main hall.

About thirty people seemed to have gathered there, and as Frances' eyes became accustomed to the gloom and began to distinguish individuals, a shudder passed over her. It may have been the weird and faint illumination, it may have been because some of the women had thrown about them gaudy Oriental robes picked from a huge heap of drapery upon the floor, but it seemed to her as if she had entered an inferno, where dwelt behind pallid and evil faces all the corroding passions of man. Allendale again took her by the hand and led her to a group of women. One of them, a deformed dwarf, who had on a gown of stiff sky-

blue satin, began to chatter to Frances. It appeared that she edited a sheet—evidently rather scandalous in its nature—and wanted to know whether Frances practised any distinguishing art or vice that would justify a notice. Disappointed in this hope, she hurried unceremoniously away, and Frances remained alone upon her divan, watching this motley crew.

All vital forces seemed suddenly to leave her as, to her vision, Ware's broad figure detached itself from a crowd of men that stood before one of the paintings. Her lids, dry and hot, burned her eye-balls as she looked away. Then, as swiftly as the sudden weakness, a wave of gladness and tremulous love rolled over her. She had not known how much she loved him, how inexorably he was to her the one centre and reason of life. In the sudden joy of finding him so unexpectedly she could have gone to him, there before all those hideous creatures, and put her arms around him.

For some breathless minutes he wandered about with a faintly ironical smile. The smile flickered out abruptly as he perceived her.

"May I sit here?" he asked.

She nodded.

He took possession of her at once in the strong way she loved.

"How did you get here?"

"Papa met Mr. Allendale, and so—"

"And are you enjoying it?" he broke in.

"No; there is something repulsive about Mr. Allendale and his house and his guests—something that chokes and smothers. You know Miss Bertram?"

"The Corpse?"

"Don't," she protested.

"That is her nickname. Allendale, whose name, by the way, is O'Hagan, being so nastily fat himself, has a lust for living skeletons."

She blushed a little at his drastic expression.

"Forgive me, dear," he said, "but, in regard to these people, one loses one's sweet reasonableness."

"Sweet reasonableness is never your most shining quality. But I thought you had rather a taste for decadence?"

"Decadence! decadence! Open the windows, throw out these tawdry rags, and you have left a crowd of Philistines with all their common and disreputable vices; true freedom of action does not need red lamps and joss-sticks. A defiance of law that is not ignoble does not need sickly sentiment or pinchbeck mysticism."

"Then why do you come here?"

"I go about a good deal in these days, no matter where. I go about—to forget. I'm weary for you, sweetheart."

"Truly?"

"Really and truly," he laughed.

The blue smoke of the joss-sticks now made the atmosphere stifling and the monotonous din of conversation seemed to hurt the nerves.

"If I stay here much longer," said Julian, "I'll have a headache. Won't you come with me? Won't you?"

The dear old lyric intonation soared in his voice.

"I'll come!"

Allendale was slimily voluble as they took leave of him. He regarded them with a sympathy and approval that were insulting.

"Listen to me," said Ware. "I've had the honour of Miss Garnett's acquaintance for some time. She permits me, therefore, to accompany her on the way back. Understand?"

"But thoroughly, my dear Julian. How should I not?"

Julian turned impatiently away.

"What's the use of being annoyed by the creature? Let's go."

They did not realise how long they had been in

the house. But when they slipped into the open it was dark and the sky was full of stars. The streets and fields about them were very still. A blithe wind blew under the stars, and Frances breathed freely once more, amid these sane and beautiful and lasting things. Julian seemed to her, at this moment, at one with them in his temper and influence. He, too, to her, was strong and sane and comely. In her sensitive reaction against the dim atmosphere, as of some putrid spiritual marsh, which they had just left, she nestled close to him. But the monotony and dull repression of her home, occurring vividly to her, were almost more terrible than Mr. Allendale's darkened hot-house. No; Julian was her only refuge. Only with him did she live, only in his presence was life worth the living. Surely he could not wrong her, and perhaps—a very flame and glory of hope came at the thought—perhaps he would change his views, would see that love is an unending good without limit or reserve, incapable of diminution or death! She would teach him—and save him! She clung to him unconsciously, with an almost protecting gesture.

"Frances," he said, "you remember our last conversation?"

"Yes."

"It may be wrong, but I must appeal to you once more. I love you with all my strength, with every nerve, with every fibre of my body. I have been living in the acutest misery, and yet—"

He halted.

"And yet you have not been able to overcome your repugnance to marriage, to conquer a—memory?"

"No!"

"You will overcome it."

"Dearest,"—he took her hand,—“don't trust to such a change. I must not, can not let you do that!"

"And if I trust in spite of your protest? If I have more faith in the endurance of your love than you have yourself?"

"It isn't a risk, dear. It's a certainty. I cannot swear impossible and absurd oaths; I cannot set up a Philistine household. I cannot enter into a relation vulgarised and officialised by the greasy sentimentality of a hundred generations. And then—then—there's something in me of the Wild, the ancient Wild. I can't submit to any bond. I cannot, cannot!"

"But if you love me. . . ."

"I do love you, absolutely."

They looked into each other's eyes, there, under the waving trees and white stars. It seemed to her that her being melted into his as it had done aforetime, somewhere in the illimitable universe, that he was her mate, her protector, her salvation. She leaned toward him gradually, like one in a dream, until his lips met her forehead.

"You will come?" he asked softly.

She had no words in which to clothe her assent. Speech would have been too coarse, too misrepresentative. A space of silence passed between them. Then she spoke:

"I will trust you—you—!"

They agreed that he would write to her when he had made a few necessary arrangements and appoint a time and place of meeting. But the sudden momentous decision had exhausted her and she lay back in the train in a half-dreamy state. He kissed her at the door of her house, and in his eyes was a look so deeply earnest, so full of a grave tenderness, that she treasured it against the inevitable doubts and terrors of the night.

VII

BUT the doubts and terrors did not come. Before this imminent crisis she was sustained by an inflexible exaltation. That the extreme and visionary sweetness of her mood was due to an alert anticipation of the senses, that the recklessness of immemorial instincts possessed her wholly—this elemental truth she would have beaten off if it had occurred to her. In the brave exhilaration of her being, hunger and thirst were consumed in the white flame of an appetite still more imperious. She was intensely alive, caressing the cool pillow with her warm palm and wrapping the sheet of her bed luxuriously about her. The coolness of her bed, the softness of her skin, the silky smoothness of her hair—she enjoyed these physical sensations with the keenness of childhood. From this immersion in a delicate sensuousness she was recalled by a sharp knock at the door of her room. Her mother's voice, raised in acid irony, followed the knock.

"Fanny, did you have a pleasant time?"

"Yes, mamma, very."

"Did you have dinner?"

"No; but I'm not hungry—only tired."

She heard her mother pass stealthily along the narrow hall, and this appearance of stealth, together with the irony of her voice, frightened her. It brought into her mind the one seemingly unpardonable element of the situation—the deceit toward those who were, after all, most intimately dear to her, and to whom she owed, for years of unflagging, if not the wisest, love, an unquestionable loyalty. The fatality which, beginning with a single rash reticence, had entangled her in a woof of lies, insinuated and direct, was too tragically common to reflect upon. And surely her first reticence, forced upon her by her mother's habit of sordid speculation and criticism, had not been wrong. That an action so innocent had been inevitably followed by the ugliest deceit seemed to Frances a luminous example of that complete ethical uncertainty which, as she had strongly suspected for many weeks, is the dominant note of human conduct. Driven by an unconquerable desire of light and love, she had made a first fine breach in the spiritual wall that enclosed her life. A series of events which, as she looked back upon them,

seemed, by their very maddening subtlety, beyond the exercise of any direction, had widened the breach until—to-morrow or the day after—the whole structure might crash with ruin to the earth! And the ultimate cause of her defiance of the social law, of the lies that were hateful to her, of the terrible pain she would give her parents, lay not in any deliberate evil, originated by her will, but in the unchangeable necessities of her being. This was the more clear because she knew that she would not, ultimately, draw back from the last and fatal step. At the thought of giving up Julian, of returning to the meaningless monotony of her past, a terror took possession of her so elemental and unreasonable as might grip one who, being led to death, pleads in unmanned weakness, impelled by no cravenness of spirit, but by a primal instinct stronger than himself, for life—life upon any terms. And so, staring wide-eyed into the solemn darkness, she came to that last and most ancient refuge of man—beaten upon by the unpitying tides of conscience and of resistless desires—an accusation of Eternal Power.

“Thine hands have made me and fashioned me together round about, yet Thou dost destroy me.”

This ardent girl, alone with the mysteries of her

life, seemed to herself to stand, for one awful moment, upon a promontory jutting out into the black chaos of things, whence she could see that good and evil were naught, that we are driven by desires not of our own devising, by needs that, if denied, will crush faith and loyalty and honour. And she abandoned, for a space, that wistful communion with God which so often in past years had helped her to endure and not to faint.

Of the future she had no longer any fear. A consciousness of power seemed to have arisen in her, the recognition of something dæmonic in her personality. Was not Julian the first man who had really had a chance to see and know her, and had he not, by his own confession, surrendered to the compulsion of her charm? Ultimately, if she desired it, he must marry her.

She arose, lit the dim jet of gas, and stood before the mirror. Her heavy hair lay darkly in thick folds upon her white night-gown; her grey eyes burned; the full, red lips gleamed strangely. The night-gown, falling open, revealed her throat and bosom to the delicate curvature of her small, cup-like breasts. A passion of pride and power and the glory of coming days, of soaring liberation from the constraints of the past, surged up in her.

She was free to live, made to enjoy, strong to conquer! She returned to bed, but could not sleep. Until the coming of the gaunt, grey dawn her pulses hammered and she could not close her eyes. Then she fell at last into a dreamless and unbroken slumber.

It was late when she awoke—nearly eleven o'clock. She was dimly surprised that she had not been called. But no misgiving came to her. The tense exaltation of the night persisted still. She must follow her call—the call of life: if not upon terms of which society approved, then upon others which she had justified before the tribunal of her own soul. She dressed slowly and with care. It would be a difficult day, perhaps the most difficult she had ever known. But she meant to get it over without flinching.

A ray of feeble sunlight hovered in the dining-room. The ugly furnishings, standing with rigid precision, should have quailed under it. But they seemed to Frances, like so many things in her old life, to glory in the shame of their hideousness. What struck her again upon this fateful day, as so often before, was not the poverty of her home. That she could have smiled at without self-consciousness. It was the terrible respectability, the

air of "honest poverty," contemptuous of all grace and loveliness as savouring of the immoral, that roused in her a fierce repulsion. But all that was at an end for her. She would look upon it now with calmness. If she could have thought of her mother with a pity less troubling and profound she would have been happy. But it was, at least, consoling to think that her presence had added nothing to her mother's content. She would have been, oh, so willing to help, but she had steadily refused to be a party to that mad career of cleaning and scouring which seemed to be her mother's life. One servant after another had lived with them in idleness, and Frances had never been able to convince herself that, since a servant was kept, she should help to do her work. . . . Mrs. Garnett appeared, pale and dishevelled. She put some eggs and a cup of coffee before Frances.

"I didn't call you for breakfast, because I wanted to see you alone."

"Yes, mamma?"

"Yes; I saw what happened at the door last night."

"Julian kissed me."

"Fanny, have you no shame?"

The spring of love and compassion dried up in

the girl's heart before this stupid blundering of abuse.

"When is he going to marry you?"

Frances made no reply.

"So this is what you've come to; this is the reward your father and I get for our care, for our sacrifices: that you have become this man's mistress. And you dare to sit before your mother without a blush on your face, you—you—"

"Hush, mamma; you'll be sorry. You don't mean that."

"Every word of it, every word. I hope to God you'll never see another happy day in your life. But I know you won't."

"No," said Frances, in a colourless voice, "not if I give up Julian."

"You have no shame, no decency, no honour."

Mrs. Garnett rocked to and fro, her hands wrapped in her apron. Frances, cold and pale, pushed the plates away from her.

"If you could give me any reason for your prophecy," she said, "I would listen gladly. If you were to tell me that in going away with Julian I would be offending God and His law—I might not agree with you, but I would understand. You say nothing of the kind. It is because what I do seems

to you not respectable. You care only for the opinion of people whom I never saw and who shall not be my judges. What do they know of me or my needs? What experience have you had in such things? You do not even care for my happiness, but only for a miserable fetish of propriety before which you have grovelled all your life. You have not been wretched because we were poor, but because, in spite of our poverty, you insisted on an apartment in an expensive neighbourhood, on a separate drawing-room and dining-room! Why? We had no friends, no visitors. Because it is respectable to have things so! Why didn't we live a few blocks farther east and have a little more money for food and amusements? Because it is not respectable! And do you think that I will order my life in any such fashion? No! I must live, experience—be! No man shall judge for me."

The girl stopped, surprised at her own vehemence. It did not occur to her that she had brooded over this arraignment, silently, for years. But she spoke to a mind ossified in rigid grooves—a mind inflexible and dead, which, in its misery, hardly took in the sense of her words. Mrs. Garnett slowly unwound her hands from her apron of checked homespun.

"And the way you've lied—lied to your father and me!"

Frances' lips grew sullen and her eyes expressionless. What was there to say? She was, by nature, passionately truthful—this she knew. But for the communication of truth, luminously the thought flashed through her mind, there needs not only the teller but the competent hearer. In her mother's mind, the truth, had she told it, would have become distorted, at every stage, into a monstrous slander, an intolerable lie. Mrs. Garnett, oppressed by her daughter's silence, began to cry softly.

"Fanny, I don't understand you."

"No, mamma, you don't; you never will."

It was somewhat brutally said, but Frances, who did not herself cry easily, was often irritated by her mother's tears.

The older woman's anger broke out anew.

"Don't flatter yourself that I don't understand. It's easy enough. I know what you try to hide from me; I know you fling away self-respect and modesty. But I won't say another word to you. I'll see what your father has to say."

Mrs. Garnett went back into the kitchen and began to scrub with a contemptuous energy that

seemed to scrape upon every nerve in her daughter's body. Frances, hence, took refuge in her room, and sitting there, on her bed, brooded, strangely enough, upon the isolation of each soul alone as the separate stars in their tremendous orbits, and incapable of any message that should make to vibrate harmoniously answering chords. With Julian she could, at times, communicate freely, and thus with him, in so homeless a world, was, after all, her truest home. An immediate choice had been forced upon her. Their meeting had been arranged for the day after to-morrow. But the more she thought, the more she quailed before the futile acerbation of a scene with her father. He was not, she profoundly believed, hard or inflexible on vital matters, as her mother thought him; and yet he, too, would urge her to an impossible renunciation. She put on her hat and gloves, drew a thick grey veil over her face and softly went out. Upon the landing it came to her with a pang that she was leaving her father's house like a thief in the night. It was only another example of the boundless perversity of things. . . .

In the streets she breathed more freely. The air was cool and sparkling. Even the tracery of shadows thrown on the pavement by the huge structure

of the Elevated Railroad was not unbeautiful. Eighth Avenue hummed with alert life. The children, playing before the shops, seemed almost to flash in the sunlight. From carts against the curb drifted the healthful aroma of apples; oranges gleamed upon them, all gold. So bright and busy were all things in the rarefied Autumn air that Frances almost forgot the tragic ugliness behind her. The road stretched before her, lustrous, kissing, in far distances, the pearly sky. It was good to be alive and free.

Her ardour was a little dulled when she found that Julian was not at home. But her heart was still hopeful, and she sat down on a bench in the vestibule to wait. The uniformed mulatto porter grinned impudently at her; but receiving no notice, began to crack peanuts defiantly. Men came and went through the vestibule, and each one glanced at Frances, courteously, but with an unmistakable air of faint surprise. Her cheeks began to burn and her eyelids to ache. She looked at her watch and found that only half an hour had passed. She was very thirsty and the stiff, wooden bench hurt her back. But she dared not leave the house, fearing that she would miss Julian. An hour passed and all her limbs began to ache. Her eyes grew dim

with tears of pain and humiliation; one fell and clung absurdly to the meshes of her veil. The men who passed in and out with such cruel frequency looked at her now with a perceptible stare. She had made of herself a public show, but the longer she waited the more impossible did it seem to move. At last, with a relief as incommunicably sweet and precious as the cessation of some corroding pain, she saw Julian enter the vestibule. His forehead contracted slightly as he saw her.

"You here? I thought we were not to meet until day after to-morrow."

"Julian, I've been waiting for you so long."

"Poor child! Come; we'll get some luncheon in the neighbourhood. This is no place for you."

They went to a pleasant restaurant—a minute's walk—and sat down. Julian insisted that she looked fagged and should drink a cup of bouillon before explaining her action. Then he looked at her questioningly.

"Julian, mamma saw us at the door last night."

"Yes; well?"

"Well, we had a terrible explanation this morning—terrible! I had said that I would see you no more. And now—? I'm sick of deceit; I can't go on that way—I can't."

"You could not have saved yourself the scene?"

"No. My mother is—oh, I can't speak of it! She spoke words to me that I must never hear again. And to-night, when papa comes home there is to be—a tribunal; and oh, what is the use, since things are as they are?"

"Are as they are?" he echoed, and his eyes burned as he bent them upon her.

She looked away.

"Yes. . . ."

"You may trust me, my dearest," he said, slowly, "me and my love. You are right—that life could not go on. There is a fairer life before us. Thank God that you have come."

He had grown pale with an exultant joy and kept silent for a space, mastering his emotion. Then he looked at her thoughtfully.

"Of course, we've had no time for preparation. And I've a pressing engagement for to-night." He stopped a moment. "But, to be sure, you have only the clothes you are wearing?"

"Yes."

"That helps us. It will be well for us to leave New York for a while, and I will procure tickets for us on a steamer sailing South at once. You have never been in the South and you will find the

winter there charming. But I must have to-day and to-morrow free to arrange my own affairs. So you can use the time to buy yourself a complete outfit."

"And where am I to be?"

"In a private hotel."

"Alone?"

"I've explained the situation to you, dearest."

She wanted to tell him that she would never again stand in such bitter need of him as during these first few desolate days; that, before the bare facts, all the strange exaltation, all her intellectual certainty were pitifully melting away, and that she felt like a lost child. But there was a sternness in his look which silenced her.

They went to the nearest station of the Subway and rode to Astor Place. On Eighth Street, near Fifth Avenue, Julian rang the bell of a respectable but secretive-looking house. The landlady, a German woman, black-haired, quiet, but alert, came to the door herself. Julian explained that the young lady with him desired a room until the day after to-morrow. With almost imperceptible emphasis, he added that he would call for a few minutes on the morrow. The landlady nodded and left the parlour.

"My dear," said Julian, "you will not be annoyed here. To-morrow after twelve I'll come and we'll take luncheon together. In the meantime get everything you need."

Almost furtively, he placed a purse on the table. Then he opened his arms.

"Don't be afraid, my own little girl. Think of day after to-morrow. Then we'll be together."

"Always?" she asked tremulously.

"Always!"

He kissed her mouth and eyes and went out. She heard the slamming of the front door and hurried to the window. But he did not look back.

VIII

FRANCES sat down in the shabby velvet arm-chair. She felt utterly abandoned. She had been brave enough with all the sustaining forces of her past about her. Now she was afraid, lost, sick at heart. A soft shuffling of feet in the hallway was followed by the entrance of the landlady.

"I have not a front-room for you, Madame."

Frances tried to smile.

"It hardly matters for such a short time."

"No, and ze room I gif you iss very nice. If you vill now come up?"

She led the way upstairs to a large, cool room at the back of the house, with a distressing view upon stony courts and fluttering clothes-lines, but comfortably and, in truth, not unhandsomely appointed.

"Now, if you vill vant anyzing, you vill yoost ring ze bell. So, zat iss right, not?"

She was about to go, but turned back.

"But I must not forget. Ziss is yours, I zink?"

She held out Julian's purse.

Involuntarily, before she could restrain herself, Frances' eyes filled with tears.

"Yes."

The German woman's face softened.

"You must be more careful wiss ze money, madame. It iss ze only real zing ve haf. . . ."

Frances divined the woman's meaning and flushed furiously. It seemed to her, when the woman was gone, that she could not touch the purse. All the social instincts of her womanhood rebelled against the money. But she knew that Julian would be impatient if she delayed their voyage by not providing the things that were, after all, indispensable. Also, she reasoned that by implication she had really pledged herself to accept his support, and she was just enough to see that she would inflict useless pain upon him by making trouble over so ugly but so necessary a detail of life. He had behaved in the matter with all the delicacy—not very fine or subtle, to be sure—but with all of which the situation was susceptible. If she accentuated the detail, the vulgarity would undeniably be on her side. This reasoning would have satisfied her fully, if only the landlady had not made that

odious reference. Why, why had Julian brought her here?

She opened the purse and discovered, to her amazement, that it contained far more money than she had ever seen, and, with this thought, a pleasant sense of power came, insidiously, to her. She sat still, handling the bills dreamily. Yes, it would be delightful to spend money upon herself with what seemed to her a splendid recklessness. In her young dreams she had spent a great many fortunes; the poorer she had been, the more gorgeously had she lived in her imagination. And now—? Julian loved her and it was dear and kind of him to be so quietly generous. She would go out and buy some things for a part of the money—not all, of course. That would be abusing his kindness.

She put on her solitary little hat and walked the short distance to Wanamaker's. There she indulged all the feminine longings of her soul, so long and so sorely starved. She bought dresses and hats and gloves, long, beautifully woven stockings, and daintily embroidered underwear, things flimsy and charming such as she had never before possessed. With a momentous little sigh she hesitated between garters with solid gold buckles and those with plated ones. She decided to take the former. They

would be more satisfactory in the end. And now she bought veils, and handkerchiefs like gossamer, and, finally, wonderful shoes of graceful shape and positively no weight at all. The hours passed in a delicious madness, and when it was all over she still had a considerable sum left. She ordered these things to be sent at once to her lodgings, and with a deep satisfaction tingling in her blood, went out into the dusty street.


She discovered that she was very hungry, and slipped into a modest little restaurant. There she ordered tea and toast and salad and little cakes. The meal, without soup or meat, was to her own taste. But she could hardly finish it, so drowsy she was. The day had been long and busy and varied, but it was ending in soft dreaminess and peace. No fear or misgiving disturbed her now as she entered the lodging-house and then her room, and, wearied with the intense living of so many hours, she fell asleep at once. . . .

Morning came, cool and windy, but full of luminous sunlight. Frances awoke, and seeing the room in which she lay, the whole strangeness and danger of the situation gripped her. But the sight of her new trunks was calming, not because her heart was set wholly, or even disproportionately,

upon material things, but because, by virtue of these things, she had entered one of the valleys of the faery land of her dreams, and a golden haze softened the sharp realities of life. No doubt it was very heartless and frivolous, but she could not help being glad that these charming things were hers, that she need not hurry to the table and hear her mother's exasperated complaints shrilling through the dim shabbiness of their Harlem flat. Never had she felt so keenly, as in her new-found freedom, how poverty enslaves and degrades. She tried to force herself to think sorrowfully of her father and mother, to press the thorn into her heart, but she could only summon a vague pity as for things far off and half forgotten. She got up and dressed herself in her soft, new apparel. The delicate linen and the silk stockings seemed to caress her flesh. She put on a grey gown trimmed with smooth velvet and rich Persian bands. Hat and gloves harmonised with the gown, and she stood before the mirror satisfied. With her pretty clothes she seemed deliberately to have put on a new personality. She seemed surer of herself and of others. The horrible old torture of being so often, externally, at a disadvantage, and of being, in consequence, shy and awkward, seemed unimaginable now. Her

glance was directer, her step firmer, her manner more assured. She was very clearly conscious of the transformation and realised something of the innermost spiritual reaction of the externals of life.

She went out, breakfasted, and took a short walk. She was glad that it was already ten o'clock, so that only two hours need pass before Julian would come. She bought a magazine, returned to the house and sat down in her room. But she could not read. Her thoughts swayed in a whirl of light. She pictured to herself the swift voyage on which they were going, softly over immeasurable seas, the white foam following; the palms and gaudy flowers of the South, and love—love as a guide. Through all the years she had yearned with a heart-breaking nostalgia for bright and beautiful places. She had dreamed of wide, stately verandahs, with views of far blue waters and vigilance above of everlasting stars. There she had seen herself clad in lustrous white, and beside her a figure, strong but indistinct, who spoke adoring words. The dream was superlatively silly, fearlessly sentimental, victoriously romantic, splendidly reckless of time and place, and the sad probabilities of mortal life—a dream of youth. And it was coming true! This was her hour of purest happiness, luminous forever through



all the years to come. She stood upon the imminent boundary of the Land of her Heart's Desire, where yet no cruelty of love could assail, no shadow fall. Firmly she held the fair things that are not and therefore are immortal. This was her hour. . . .

Julian came promptly upon the stroke of twelve. He tilted her chin and kissed her. He was in one of his sunny moods.

"What a little duck you look! Did you get everything you needed?"

"Yes. I'm afraid I spent a great deal—and here's the rest."

"No, dear; that's not the way we can manage. I hate discussion about money, so let us settle this at once. I'm not a Cræsus. But what I have we'll share. You use the money as you see fit, and say no more about it."

She put her hands into his.

"You *are* good!"

"Don't, dear. No man is good—in a sense. And now," he continued, "we must go out for some luncheon. I have still to attend to innumerable details."

They talked with a bright restlessness of their voyage and the Winter to come. He told her many

things of the country to which they were going, and all the details seemed to her exquisitely romantic. But they shared silences, too, more eloquent than any speech, for there was before them that one eternal adventure of mankind—love—more romantic than any palm-girt land, more formidable than any earthly voyage.

"I'm glad that I've never been anywhere, have never seen anything," she said dreamily; "so now everything will be so new, so delightful. . . ."

She was a little irritated at the businesslike thoroughness with which Julian ate the successive courses of the meal. He noticed her irritation and laughed.

"You must get used to it, sweetheart; I am, after all, a mere man not made of air and fire, and good food is a good thing. . . ."

His irony hurt her and she kept silence. As he continued to eat, her irritation grew. He looked up at her and his face grew grave.

"Did I hurt you, dearest? It was just a manner of speaking."

But she was not so happy after this incident. Carefully as he tried to conceal his feelings, he was evidently apprehensive that she would make trouble over little things. He left her at the door of the

lodging-house, bidding her to be ready at eleven o'clock of the next forenoon. He pressed her hand and then lifted his hat courteously, but the kiss which he had not been able to give her burned upon her lips like fire.

It was only three o'clock and the interminable hours stretched out before her. She looked listlessly at the engraved card which Julian had given her. It bore these words: *Villa Mercedes, Queens-haven, South Carolina*. The destination did not seem so bright now. With a sudden yearning she thought of the dark little home up-town, and her father and mother left desolate; she thought of Morningside Park, dim under a rain-drenched sky; of long, lonely walks there and the twinkling black eyes of the elusive squirrels. Her heart ached. What, after all, did she know of this man with whom she was going away, for whose sake she was abandoning, at least, the security from the world's storms that had been hers? He seemed to her suddenly a being strange, hostile and full of terrible possibilities. How difficult life was, how difficult. . . .

She could not stay in her strange room with the depressing view of fire-escapes and clothes-lines, but went out into the street. Which way to turn? And then, with a melancholy pleasure, the thought came

to her to ride up-town. She might never again see the street and the house where her home was, or the park where she had dreamed so often, or the window of the drab little drawing-room which seemed, to her imagination, almost friendly now. She hesitated, troubled for a moment, in the station of the underground railroad, before she dropped her ticket into the receiver. Then she passed on. She entered an express train and in a few minutes stepped from the tunnel entrance out upon Cathedral Heights. The stately Hudson flowed on far below, but she hardly glanced in that direction, hurrying eastward.

And now she was in her own street, and something rose in her throat. Life was so hard in itself, so transitory, and men and women in their mad blindness increased its bitterness by wilfully hurting and misunderstanding each other. It seemed to her, at this moment, incredibly tragic. She walked on slowly toward the corner and passed the house where she had lived and dreamed so long. Looking forward she saw, with a swift pang, the nodding of a bonnet set awry. It was her mother returning from some household errand. The older woman looked grey and sad and shabby. Her eyes

were fixed on the ground. She came nearer and nearer, still unseeing.

"Mamma!" Frances whispered.

The tawdry, pitiful old bonnet swayed to the other side.

"Oh, my child!"

Suffering had purged the voice of sharpness and reproach.

"Fanny, are you coming home?"

The girl shook her head sadly.

"No, mamma, dear; I can't—I can't. It's too late."

"Where are you?"

"Down-town; but we're going away to-morrow. Mamma, will you write to me?"

She opened her purse and gave her mother the card bearing her Southern address.

"I don't know. I'm not accustomed to write letters, but I'll try. Fanny, it's very lonely at home."

"Oh, mamma, I'm sorry, so terribly sorry. What does papa say?"

"Not a word; and he won't let me say anything, either. Will you come up?"

But Frances shook her head again. She could not bear it. She put her arms about her mother and kissed her long and close. The kiss was full

of remorse, of impassioned pity, and of the sternness of fate. As she watched the door of the house hide the last tip of her mother's bonnet her eyes filled with scalding tears. This, then, was an end of all the old things that seemed suddenly to have grown dear. Resolutely she turned her head from the house. She had chosen. Slowly she passed once more through the familiar streets; she saw the grocery-shop, the butcher-shop, the bakery, whither she had often gone with what had seemed to her then a derogation of her girlish dignity. If it were all to be lived over again, would she perform her duties in a gentler mood and with a sweeter spirit? She thought so, and yet knew the thought to be deceptive. The old narrowness, the old ugliness, the old repression would stir again the old passionate revolt. Passing to Eighth Avenue, she ascended the high tower of the Elevated Railroad at One Hundred and Sixteenth Street, and rode back to Astor Place.

In her room she was surprised by a long envelope upon her table. It was a special delivery letter addressed in Julian's nervous handwriting. She tore it open and the enclosure that fell out was a letter from her father, sent to her at Julian's apartment. Her hands trembled as she opened it and hurried

to a seat near the window where, in the evening light, she read, not without tears, her father's words:

"I am inexpressibly grieved, not only by your conduct, which, though I condemn, I understand, but perhaps more by the want of confidence in my love and friendship that you have shown. Your mother, with the best intentions, no doubt, exaggerated what she conceives to be my sternness. You might have known me better! The problems involved were so very, very different. But the words I wish to say to you in all kindness, yet all seriousness, are these: The experience of numerous generations, the consensus of civilised mankind—these things are based, you must believe, upon no light impulse, no varying utility, but upon deep and constant needs. The individual breaks through these elementary restrictions at his own peril, and I solemnly warn you and Ware either to separate or to make your peace with society by marrying. You have gone with him, I believe, freely consenting to an irregular union, and hence I accuse him of no melodramatic crime, but include him in my kindly warning. I am firmly convinced, my child, that you have made a terrible and sinful mistake, but I

wish to convince you, not to alienate you by vain reproaches. Our home is very sad without you, and I am lonely in my growing age. But it is not my happiness that I am concerned for; it is yours. Remember, my dear child, that whatever happens, I am your friend and protector, and my home is yours. But you must return to me either alone or as a married woman; nor do I think it well that you should write to me until you are either one or the other."

The temperateness and kindness of the letter touched her poignantly. She was in no mood to heed its warning or follow its reasoning. Rather did it give her hope for the future and gladness in the recognition that life was not always cruel, not wholly merciless; that the victory was not always to blind prejudice and passion, but to charity, to reasonableness and to the understanding heart.

IX

THE grey dawn awakened Frances from her light sleep. She drew apart the hangings of a window and looked out. A swift wind drove turbulent clouds over a gaunt and pallid sky. It was a day on which to bury one's old life and to set out with the far-travelling winds on other quests. The spirit of the day passed into her soul. She was glad that the sea would receive her and the impetuous wind carry her afar upon its wings. She opened the window and let her hair stream in the air—in the brave adventurous wind. The world seemed rapturously wide. Oh, that there might be no goal of faring and no end of travel.

It was impossible to return to bed. She dressed herself warmly as befitted a far voyage. Then she packed her trunks and, having done that, paced her dim room in a fury of restlessness. The wind whistled and raindrops splashed against the window-panes. But the insurgent wind was not so swift as the running of her blood; the patter of the

rain not so breathless as the beating of her heart. To be away, away, over a slate-coloured sea, under a dim heaven, driven by vast, irresistible storms, onward to the ends of the earth!

At eight she ventured out. The wind blew upon her, lifted her skirt, tore off her veil, worried her hair. She fought her way along the street with tingling pleasure. This was to live! After a while she became hungry and, entering a restaurant, ate a hearty breakfast. Then out again, for she could not keep still in this glorious travelling-weather, out into the wind!

At length she grew a little tired and returned to the lodging-house. She had only about another hour to wait, and it would pass swiftly. Then Julian would come to take her away. The slight irritation during their last meeting was forgotten, her own perilous position was forgotten, and her father's grave words. She used to herself the ancient simile of the liberated bird. The doors of her cage had opened at last. She ran up once more to her room to see that she had forgotten none of her new and precious possessions in her haste. Then she returned to the parlour and gazed out upon the scurrying Autumn weather.

At eleven o'clock a huge four-wheeler drove up to the door and Julian stepped out. He came in swiftly and caught her as she ran to his arms. The same feeling possessed both: this was the beginning of life. But after that first embrace Julian was brief and business-like. Abruptly he ordered that the trunks be carried out. His own had been sent on before. Then he called for the landlady, paid her and dismissed her brusquely. He turned to Frances.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then."

He gave orders to the driver and helped Frances into the carriage. They sat close together and held each other's hands. He lifted her hand to his lips and kissed it.

"It isn't merry weather, is it, dear?"

"Ah, but I like it."

"Good! So do I. I thought perhaps you wouldn't. It's just the day for a mad start."

"Julian!" She looked at him reproachfully.

"Sweetheart, it's a mad world. Life is mad, death is mad, but love is the maddest of all things! Wait, wait!"

He kissed her mouth and eyes softly and tenderly, and she was satisfied. They drove through dim and narrow streets on the lower West Side, through Greenwich Street, the rumbling Elevated Railroad almost filling it, and turned the corner of Spring Street to the North River. There in the indescribable confusion of the wharf traffic, amid huge waggons and drays, whose drivers, infuriated by delay and rain, cursed hoarsely, the carriage slowly made its way. At last it reached the passenger entrance of the Hope Line. Sleek negro porters assisted Frances and Julian to alight and led them, first through a narrow hall, then across a carpeted gang-plank, to the clean-swabbed deck of the *Sequoia*.

They stood still and looked into the black waters idly beating the vessel's side. The flapping of a rope, far in the tall rigging, seemed to be the only sound. For the noises of the city had suddenly melted away, as if already an immeasurable distance divided it from them. Before them lay the harbour, full of outgoing ships. The sight seemed to Frances suddenly to estrange her from her whole past. She turned to Julian and folded her small, gloved hands on his breast.

"Dear, I have no one but you now. You will be kind and patient?"

For the first time since she had known him a moisture gathered in his eyes.

"I will, dear heart, please God."

X

THE wind fell. Over calm waters but under heavy clouds, the *Sequoia* steamed through the harbour of New York. Heavy mists hid the shore on either side and nothing was visible to the searching eye save the grimy harbour traffic of coal-barges and wheezing tug-boats. Forlornly the hoarse whistles saluted each other; and with eyes strangely dull and lifeless, men from the cabin-windows of barge and boat surveyed the steamer going South. To them, in their coarse lives on the inland waters or along the river-front, the passengers of the *Sequoia* were alien beings in an alien world. Was there behind those heavy eyes no yearning to leave the grime of coal and tar, the shriek of whistles, the hoarse voices hurtling oaths, and follow a fairer way along the ocean-path? It seemed to Frances that there must be woe in these longing hearts and lamentation. But Julian would not agree with her.

"Your fanciful pity," he said, "is really a failure

in sympathy. For those men the world of their own lives is real and tremendously insistent. Their work is broken by coarse pleasures which suit them. They have no time for vague emotionalism. Their attitude to us, if they have any, is probably quite satirical."

"And I was so sorry for them!"

"Your pity is the last thing they want, and they are right."

"How hard you are, Julian."

"As the truth is hard."

A sudden clangour startled them both. They turned and saw a negro steward beating a muffled kettle-drumstick against a huge, round gong. The thunderous vibrations swept through their nerves and quivered far down their spines. It was the call to luncheon. A sense of the unreality of all things came to Frances. She and Julian would now go to their state-room to wash and dress for the meal, and would be, for the first time, in the most intimate manner, alone together. She could not believe that these things had really come to pass. Had she not, so far, played with things unrealised? The reality was upon her. Julian divined her nervousness and its cause and lingered yet a few minutes. But he was hungry, after all.

"Come, dear."

They had procured a state-room on the upper deck. It was small, but neat and compact. Frances glanced furtively at the two narrow, white berths, one above the other. Then she started to arrange her hair before the slanting mirror. In it she could watch Julian, who had sat down on the small sofa behind her, and she saw how he grew pale and how his hands grasped the cushion as the coils of her hair slowly unwound themselves and rolled down her back. He got up and stretched out his arms toward her. She closed her eyes for a space and he kissed her soft hair and face with an abandon of passion. Then he put her away, laughing.

"I suppose we ought to go to luncheon."

It was strange to see him take off his coat and bathe his hands and face. But his matter-of-course air comforted her and she did not betray her emotions. He sat down again on the sofa, polishing his nails, and she noted the extreme precision and neatness of all his personal habits. Then they went down to the dining-hall.

The chief steward, a small, stout man, met them at the door. He examined the tickets to discover what places had been assigned them at the table,

and Frances, glancing over his shoulder, saw that the second ticket bore the name of Mrs. Julian Ware. She did not know why the deception made her ashamed, seeing that she had accepted the situation of which it was an inevitable part. But a certain vulgarity seemed to cling to it, as to the seductions in penny-dreadfuls of which she had read very long ago. It seemed to her, at all events, as if every eye must be upon her, as if even the tawdry, cadaverous woman torn hither and thither by two unruly and repulsive children, who sat across the board from her, must arise in denunciatory wrath. That the woman sadly envied her for her youth and apparent prosperity, did not occur to her. Julian was delicately attentive, but she had no appetite. She did not like the food, to which clung a pervasive flavour of bananas and aromatic grapes, and she felt ill at ease among the people who sat at the long tables. They were a strange enough crew: retired shop-keepers, probably, and mechanics, coarsely prosperous in a small but obtrusive way, wearing odd caps by which they seemed to symbolise this adventurous break in their humdrum lives; men with scraggy beards, gross feeders, to whom the not very delectable but pretentious fare was of unusual splendour. They re-

marked upon it with smacking of lips and a plentiful use of wooden tooth-picks. Large-boned women and girls in the finery of country shops sat between, breaking out, at the veriest nothings, into harsh, empty laughter. The talk of all these people was appalling in its sheer externality. They spoke of the places in Florida to which they were bound, of the chances there of hunting and fishing. Stories were told of huge fish caught near Fernandina. The speed of the vessel was discussed and compared with that of others of the same line. Not the simplest reflection, not the faintest idea illuminated the talk. It was an interminable clatter of things, things, things—until Frances' head swam and her eyes ached. She told Julian of her impression and his eyes dwelt upon her with deep tenderness.

"I am so glad you feel all that independently. Isn't the talk discouraging? When one considers the average American's complete immersion in the mere machinery of life one loses all hope in our future. The blackest bigotry of the most unintelligent creed would be better than this utter soullessness!"

"Infinitely, of course. But is this the average American?"

"I'm afraid so, my dear. One hardly meets him

in the mass in New York. But so soon as one begins to travel—there he is, and always the same: good-natured and by no means stupid; full of a superficial intelligence, but utterly without intellect. He has forgotten his Bible and is cynical on the subject of politics. What remains? An interest in the mere mechanism of existence, the speed of trains and the trade of ports. It would be merely hateful if it were not so dangerous to our whole national future.”

Frances was glad to discuss serious subjects with him; glad, too, of their community of feeling which showed itself so often. But the oppression of humanity was upon her and she wanted to go out on deck into the keen sea air. Julian helped her up the winding stairs, which seemed now to swing perilously. She did not feel better on deck. They had passed through the whole length of the harbour and were out among the tumbling waves. The ship rocked dizzily and Frances clung to the railing. A feeling of extreme helplessness and lassitude assailed her. Julian put his arm around her and looked smilingly upon her pale face.

“I’m afraid you’re not a good sailor, dear. But try to fight the sea-sickness down; it sometimes

yields to energetic treatment. And don't look at the water."

He told her to keep still where she was and went to fetch a long deck-chair. This he placed with its back against the railing; then made her lie down in it, and wrapt her feet in a travelling-rug. But she was ill and afraid. The huge smoke-stack of the ship, from which she could not take her eyes, seemed alternately to fall towards her and then to plunge into the sea beyond. She had never experienced such unrelieved misery of the body. The sharpest definite pain would have been preferable. Vague odours of food floated from the door of the saloon, a wafture of tobacco-smoke from the smoking-room on deck, and both distressed Frances horribly.

"Let me go and lie down," she begged.

"Try it a little longer," he suggested. "The mental attitude is half the battle. Determine not to be sick."

She hardly heard him in her wretchedness.

"Oh, I can't bear it, I can't bear it!"

"My dear child, no one has ever been the worse off for an attack of sea-sickness, but if you really must lie down—"

"Please, Julian!"

He supported her to the state-room and, with nimble fingers, helped her to take off her hat and lie down in the lower berth. She sighed with infinite relief and hid her head in the pillows. He stood by helplessly.

"Don't stay here," she murmured.

"Shall I send the stewardess to you?"

She shook her head.

"Leave me alone—please."

He knelt down and kissed her hand.

"Don't think that I'm not sorry for you, dearest. But I know how slight a thing it is. You'll laugh at yourself to-morrow."

He went out, and she noticed his shadow pass and repass the window as he walked briskly up and down the deck. Every now and then he would stop and look in, but, seeing that she had not changed her position, continued on his way. Thought left her, though she did not sleep. The sense of relief felt at first lying down was over and she was conscious only of the pitiless roll of the ship and the monstrous throbbing of the engine. If it would cease for a moment—ah, but for a moment! As the slow hours passed her brain cleared, though the pain and nausea continued. She thought of home, of the swift events which had brought her

into her present state, and for a while lost her grip completely, crying weakly as a child. Julian came in and asked her whether she felt better. But she turned her face away. He seemed a stranger. Sadly he went out. It was a poor beginning of her bright voyage. Night fell and she seemed to feel a little better. But now she was alone. If she could have run to her mother's arms she would have been good and happy, she thought, forever afterward. But that was impossible—that was over—all was over. . . .

For a long time all was dark about her and within her. Then she heard Julian's hand fumble at the door of the state-room and she was glad of the sound. He touched the button and turned on the electric light. He held awkwardly a tray on which had been placed a glass of milk, a plate of sandwiches and a little heap of oranges and grapes. He placed the tray on a camp-stool that he had brought in with great difficulty, and it was touching to see him, with such gravity, perform these unaccustomed ministrations. She sat up a little and discovered that she was really feeling better.

"You poor boy, it's a shame to put you to all that trouble."

He knelt down beside her.

"Oh, my dear, my dear, I'm so glad you're better."

"You haven't been worrying about me?"

"But to be sure, I have. Not about your *mal de mer*, but about the black thoughts."

"How did you know about that?"

He laughed merrily.

"It's not for nothing that one tries one's hand at writing stories. But now 'it is an order,' as Kipling says, that you eat."

He supported her with one hand and fed her with the other. It was very childish, she knew, but very charming. She decided that the spoils of the steward's pantry must be divided. It was a long meal, but quite the most delectable that she had ever eaten. When it was all over and Julian began to gather the plates and glass, she felt drowsy. He stood looking at her for a long time.

"You're tired, my dear, and it's near ten o'clock. I'll go out on deck and smoke another cigarette and in the meantime you can undress and go to bed."

She understood him gratefully. He did not come in until late, when, half asleep, she heard him moving softly in the berth above her.

When she awoke next morning the steel-bright sea, broken by troughs and furrows of golden and

insufferable brightness, glimmered through the window. She noticed that Julian had already gone out, and so she arose and dressed herself comfortably and with care. When she stepped on deck she had to close her eyes before the exceeding glory of the immeasurable sun-washed sea and sky. The whole universe was flooded with gold, and straight into the adorable warmth and sunlight sailed the smooth-travelling ship. Around the windy poop came Julian, walking briskly.

"Good-morning, sleepy-head. Breakfast is over for an hour."

"I don't care. It isn't pleasant below."

"I've ordered the steward to send you up something."

It was a perfect day, from the glory of the sunlit morning to the solemn splendour of the starlit night. The air grew blither and warmer as the hours passed on, and Frances' heart became jubilant, for the unmistakeable reality lay before her, the land of her dreams. She and Julian paid little attention to the other passengers. They had much to say to each other, much to discover in each other during this first, most intimate and less fleeting contact—from his opinion on the miracles of Christ, to the golden tone of colour that, in certain

positions, flashed in her hair. And again, when they had watched the stars for a tremulous hour, he let her go to bed alone and in peace. But he told her they must rise early in the morning, to see the *Sequoia* enter into Queenshaven Bay.

He awakened her before five o'clock and she hurried on deck. The sea was of the colour of a dark amethyst broken by scarce perceptible veins, deep down, of a dull crimson. Hand in hand they stood beside the railing as, at the very break of dawn, the ship floated into the calm, dark waters of Queenshaven Bay. So gentle was the swell of the harboured waters that their surface seemed an expanse of softly undulating silk. In the dusky sky burned still, but with a fading brilliance, a clear moon and a few quivering stars. The ship seemed scarcely to move, so slow was its progress, when, hesitatingly, over sky and harbour, poured a violet light, and out of the far dimness rose columns and steeples above the darker mass of the surrounding city. Gradually the sky lost its violet hue, the shadows of olive and purple faded, moon and stars grew faint and wan, the light was rosy, nay, crimson, victorious, sharp, and from its centre, that seemed momentarily a pool of blood, leapt over wooded island and transfigured sky the first shafts of the liberated

sun, flung sudden fires upon the projecting rocks of the break-water amid the sword-play of flashing little waves, and, flooding far, raised from the dusk, upon a narrow tongue of land between two shining rivers, the stately vision of a luminous city of rest.

The houses, as they defined themselves upon the water-front, had all an air of repose, reserve and temperate dignity. They had no abrupt angles or grotesque windows, the colour of their walls was soft and warm, but their wide verandahs, looking seaward, made them appear the fitting home of dreams. And even in that first Southern dawn there came to Frances a hint of that element of pathos which, in Queenshaven, accentuated so often beauty and repose. Many of these stately houses harmonised so exquisitely with land and sea because upon them had fallen a gentle touch of decay, a faint shadow of dissolution. It had fallen upon the swaying piers between which the *Sequoia* cast anchor. But, in a moment, Frances came to see rather the turbulent, strange life before her. In and out of the serried rows of cotton-bales ran huge negroes in small, round caps and open shirts revealing broad, black chests. They hallooed to each other with echoing, melancholy calls—deep, vibrant

and not unmusical. The gang-plank was lowered; the passengers, in narrow file, poured down it upon the wharf. A little ragged negro grasped Julian's valise: "Tote dat foh you, sah?"—and Frances felt that she had come South.

XI

IN the suave sunshine of that October morning the shadows of plantain and palmetto fell upon the white walls of the Villa Mercedes. On the verandah, under the graceful Doric portico, stood tables and delicate wicker chairs. Two women, an older and a younger, turned a faintly curious gaze upon the newcomers. The younger arose and introduced herself to Julian as Mrs. Pressley, the proprietress of the Villa. The rooms which they had ordered were in readiness. Smiling benignantly upon Frances, but without the slightest suggestion of professional courtesy, she introduced her to the older lady, tall, thin, with severe lips but kindly eyes, who was her aunt, Miss St. Preux. She rang for a servant.

"Show Mr. and Mrs. Ware their rooms."

It was the first time that Frances had heard herself called Mrs. Ware, and again, as at her glimpse of the written words, something within her, dim and undefined, revolted at the deception. The revolt was not entirely ethical, but of the reason.

Why not marry and end the whole harassing problem if the absence of the legal bond was to be scrupulously concealed? If their lives were to conform with such external precision to the demands of society, why should they hover under the constant peril of discovery and shame? But she crushed her thoughts. For a space, at least, she wanted to enjoy without misgiving—else all had been in vain.

The rooms prepared for them were charming: a sitting-room whose windows looked out upon the endless blue of the bay, a cosy bed-room and bath. Light-coloured furnishings, light hangings, chairs delicately fragile—the bright beauty of lasting Summer seemed to have stolen into these rooms to abide there. She looked out upon the gardens, upon the waters and fertile islands beyond, and wondered how, with such scenes upon earth, people dared to pass their few years of life in smoky cities, under cold and pallid skies. Beauty dwelt here and the supreme blessedness of silence. She stepped out upon the little iron balcony into this world of blue and gold. Julian followed her and she leaned against him in sudden gratitude.

“Oh, I’m glad that we’ve come here.”

“We can stay here until May,” he said; “it rare-

ly rains. All the days are blue and gold, and the nights—the nights are black and silver.”

She understood the throb in his voice. He leaned over and kissed her hair and throat.

“Not here, Julian.”

She wanted to take a walk and see more of Queenshaven at once. But Julian suggested that they must first dress and have some luncheon. Laughing, she ran into the bedroom and closed the door behind her. . . .

They entered the airy dining-room some minutes afterward and found places reserved for them near the head of the long table. Mrs. Pressley's reddish-brown hair shone a conspicuous welcome. At her left sat Miss St. Preux. Only a few others were present: a stately woman of about fifty, with sad, intelligent, brown eyes; her husband, a military-looking nonentity, and a fair, excessively slender youth with cat-like delicacy and grace of manner. Frances and Julian were introduced successively to all present. The fair youth seemed to dominate the intermittent conversation.

“At luncheon only the faithful are present,” he said, with an instructive air. “The profane, however, swarm to dine.”

"Then, Mr. Held," said the brown-eyed woman.
"I am surprised at your presence."

"Why?"

"Because I thought it your principle never to be faithful."

"In matters of no importance," he returned,
"one can afford to be faithful. In things that matter faithfulness means stagnation and death."

"You are a heretic to all your doctrines to-day. Since when do you admit that anything matters?"

"Absolutely nothing does; relatively, things do—in so far as they are pleasurable or painful."

"To you, you mean."

"Precisely."

"What do you think of such doctrines, Mrs. Ware?" asked Miss St. Preux.

"They seem very self-regarding."

"Ah, that is just it," Held almost sighed; "nothing is beautiful that is not cruel. I am sure that you are cruel, Mrs. Ware."

He looked at her with large, velvety blue eyes.

"Had you not better reserve your opinions?" Julian said angrily.

"Oh, you must pay no attention to Mr. Held's paradoxes," broke in Mrs. Pressley; "he only means to be amusing."

Held threw down his napkin with the air of a spoilt child.

"My dear Mrs. Pressley, don't attempt to define me or my efforts. All that is quite beyond you, quite."

The rudeness of his speech seemed to silence the company. When Julian and Frances arose to go Miss St. Preux asked:

"Are you going to look at Queenshaven?"

"Yes," Julian replied.

"I hope you will like it, and don't form an opinion too quickly. The real Queenshaven which those find who are worthy is very lovely."

The old lady seemed moved, and Frances said impulsively:

"I am sure I shall love it. It seems too good to be true after New York."

"Ah, yes; I am told that New York is very large and very ugly, as is natural from the influences that have made it what it is. I have never been there."

Frances felt that she liked Miss St. Preux better than anyone else here. She took the old lady's outstretched hand and pressed it warmly.

They walked through hushed streets full of gardens that showed scarcely a sign of Winter. Trees, lawns and flower-beds were subdued to quiet tints.

Here and there, in the lower city, stood houses of the Georgian period—faintly and beautifully old. The effect of the whole was one of gentleness and peace, but also of quiet high-breeding. The eighteenth-century conception of classic elegance and propriety lingered in the sunny porticos of many houses. This, indeed, seemed to Julian on that first morning the distinctive note of all that was most characteristic here: an English, eighteenth-century sense of dignity and of reserved grace. Whatever was new (and there was much) seemed in very shame to have shed the crude glare of its modernity and to have melted into the temperate comeliness of the general effect. Not a few of the residences on La Roche Street and Court House Street were sufficiently handsome, but they exhibited none of that impudent glitter of wealth which disfigures the better portion of American cities. The cleanliness and comfort of the rare tram-cars, the comparative absence of the motor-car pest, added to the city's air of dignity; and above all, the city—so much a sensitive eye could make out soon enough—was aware of itself, of its historic past, of its present difference from so much in American life that is crude and detestable. And that self-consciousness, serene but

not obtrusive, was perhaps its last and crowning grace.

Frances reasoned about none of these things. Her individual perceptions blended into a rich sense of well-being and love. She was quite sure that she would care for Queenshaven immensely; that here, too, if at all, one might attain spiritual certitude and peace. She knew that she had neither, and that, in spite of her well-being, she was not perfectly happy. It seemed to her that complete happiness demanded a sense of its own endurance in the knowledge that the source from which it springs is perennial, that it could never exist side by side with these constant repressions of troubling thought which her tortured soul made necessary. She wondered whether Julian felt that too, but she could not tell. For the moment he was completely wrapt in the external charm about them.

They wandered on to King Street, a long, narrow thoroughfare on which the principal shops of the town were situated. But here distinctive features of the city grew less salient. Standing before the window of a jewelry shop, they saw Held. He turned and came to meet them.

"You are looking at Queenshaven? She's a coy

old beauty with a prodigious stomacher and bare shoulders."

"That's true, and yet your tone makes it detestably false," said Julian.

"Are you succumbing to her antique allurements?"

"Yes, and I'm rather glad to do so. If you do not, why are you here?"

The blue eyes suddenly looked much older.

"There's less here that rasps on me than elsewhere. So I retire to Queenshaven from time to time—to rest."

Julian looked closely at the other man.

"Are you Arthur Langdon Held?"

"Yes."

"I didn't know you were a celebrity," said Frances.

"A celebrity—such as they are at present. If Mr. Ware did not in some way practise literature he would not know of my verses."

"True." Julian's voice was dry.

Held smiled a curious, self-conscious smile.

"I must be off, but we will meet at dinner."

Julian seemed irritated.

"The man has prodigious gifts, but everything

he does is false and rotten at the core. And that seems the way at present of our most gifted men."

"It is not true of your work."

"Mine—my dear? Let's not talk of it. I, at all events, have you."

"But what is the trouble with your work? You have never really told me."

"I'm shy about it—even to you. The truth seems to be that I matured late and that my faculty is not a rich or happy one. I write slowly and with infinite pains, and what's more, I've never had any encouragement, which makes continued production doubly hard. My work is unpopular; it is sombre, pessimistic, if you will."

"And can't I help you?"

"By being what you are, dearest; not by doing anything."

"Ah, you rate me very low."

"On the contrary: life is infinitely more important than literature, beauty is better than style, your charm is far above singing."

He seemed to fall into troubled thought.

"Look at this fellow, Held! I'm twice the man that he is in essential power, knowledge, insight. But his easy accomplishment, his smooth workmanship—all that's beyond me."

She looked at him wistfully.

"Ah, sweetheart," he cried, "isn't it a black shame to be annoyed by such things to-day, of all days? And, ultimately, it really doesn't matter."

She was sorry that he should think so meanly of his talents, but she was happy that he seemed to subordinate his work to her. And she nursed this monstrous delusion with care.

They turned back to the sun-washed gardens of the South and the soft romance of the city came again upon them. Julian tossed pennies to ragged little negroes on the curb who waved small, battered caps and showed rows of gleaming teeth. They had returned to their holiday mood of simple happiness.

When they went back to the Villa Mercedes Julian said that he had a few notes to write, and Frances accepted Miss St. Preux's invitation to sit with her on the verandah. From there the waters of the bay, doubly enchanted, could be seen only in long blue and gold streaks through the trees of the garden that separated the Villa from the stone parapet of the shore. Frances felt uncomfortable, as if she owed some account of herself to the tall, old lady who seemed to glare at her through strong glasses. She wondered what Miss St. Preux

thought of her, whether there was anything in her manner that betrayed the unusualness of the situation. She tried in vain to reassure herself. The hesitancy of her manner was unconquerable. Held came in through the garden and sat down on the steps. He took off his hat and passed his hand lightly over his silky, blond hair. His eyes were bluer and more *naïf* than ever.

"I'm going away," he announced calmly.

"Again?" asked Miss St. Preux.

"Actually, this time. I'm satiated with blue and gold. I shall go slumming in New York and see horrible poverty and beautifully frightful disease. It will be beatific—after this."

He looked at Frances as if about to make an experiment.

"Last time I dived into Broome Street I saw a man whose face was so eaten away by—"

"Spare us the details, Mr. Held," said Miss St. Preux, severely; "we do not share your taste."

"I am sure Mrs. Ware was interested."

"She was not!" the old woman snapped.

Frances looked at her gratefully as Held stepped lightly into the house.

"I try not to take umbrage at his remarks," said Miss St. Preux, "merely for Susie's sake—that's

Mrs. Pressley—but he is a disgusting little cad. Artistic temperament or no artistic temperament, he could not have crossed the threshold of any good house in Queenshaven twenty years ago.”

For some reason not easily definable, Frances felt aggrieved.

“Mr. Ware is an artist, too.”

“Eh? But he seems to be a gentleman.”

The tone was harsh.

“Seems, Miss St. Preux?” Frances burst out.

“Sit down, young lady. I hadn’t the least intention of speaking slightly of Mr. Ware. But that is the way of you shy people. Suddenly you flash out.”

She laid her hand with a very kindly pressure on Frances’ arm.

“Do I seem shy?”

“Very,” the old woman returned. “And it is vexing to be shy. I was similarly afflicted in my youth; but I had an old aunt on my father’s side, a gentlewoman of the oldest Carolinian stock, who gave me some invaluable advice. ‘My dear,’ she said, ‘have self-confidence! Have presence! A young woman who lacks that, lacks everything. And when you are about to enter a room full of people and feel bashful, fold your hands and say:

"O God, help me to remember that I am Miss St. Preux!" I have found such ejaculatory prayers most helpful.' "

Frances laughed, throwing back her head.

"And did you find the practice effective?"

"As you see."

The dressing bell for dinner rang and Frances hurried upstairs.

Dinner was long and formal; the conversation insignificant. Held sat next to the brown-eyed woman, whose white, well-preserved arms he took every opportunity of brushing with his hand. Mrs. Pressley was voluble in a perfunctory way. The newcomers said little, but seemed intent on their own affairs. Julian was in good spirits and whispered endearing nothings to Frances, whose arms and shoulders gleamed as of silvery silk above her darker dress. As for her, she liked the dignified propriety of the meal. She had hardly ever before dined in evening-dress, and she felt as if she were indeed living in the great world. But she could not eat much. A strange, sweet tremour shook her at intervals. Her body was aware of what her soul chose not yet to dwell upon. Julian, too, ate sparingly, but under his curved lids his eyes glowed with a changeful fire. After dinner, Frances

lingered yet a moment with Miss St. Preux. Then she followed Julian to their rooms.

A small hanging-lamp of crimson glass provided the only illumination; it swung from the ceiling of the bedchamber. The sitting-room was dark, except for the faint radiance of the amber moon, which could be seen through the window, resting apparently, upon the smooth, dark waters. Over and around it spread the troops of quiet stars. For the twinkling of an eye, Frances saw them clearly, and saw their unperturbed shining over the storms of human passion. Then the unspeakably sweet mystery of life called her. Julian's arms were about her, and his voice seemed to sob, as he said: "At last." They looked into each other's eyes, deeply, steadily, and some subtle current passed between them and shook them until they trembled like grass. Nearer he leaned, and nearer, and their lips seemed never to part. . . . Thought seemed to return to him first. He opened his arms and she ran into the sleeping-chamber. He stepped out on the balcony and smoked a cigarette to soothe the thunderous beating of his heart. Then he went in and drew down the shades over the windows. . . . He found Frances standing under the crimson lamp. Her hair fell about her like a mantle; her white

night-gown made her seem slim and frail, and she tried to conceal her small, bare feet in its folds. He came toward her slowly and reverently, as to a vision of divine grace. She dropped her hands, swayed toward him, and his lips were upon her breast. . . .

XII

THEY were alone together in the days of pure sunlight or rare, swift rain; in aromatic, purple nights, spangled with trembling stars. The world and its noises could not reach them upon their altitude of passionate enchantment, and men and women became to their centred vision mere irrelevant marionettes. The weather was so mild that she could often dress in white, and those were their days of completest union, since Julian loved the crispness and fresh odour of starched linen, that blended with the faint, sweet scent of the warm flesh beneath. His senses were of an endless curiosity, his desires subtly varied; he knew the ecstasy of denial no less than that of union; and she, in her flexible youthfulness, became an instrument that gradually sounded, with complete and immediate harmony, each lightly touched chord. Then he taught her that love is not a monotony of indulgence; that it has its reticences, its hours of tense calm, its infinitely subtle interplay of mysterious

forces, no less than its fierce storms. It seemed to her that in these weeks she became aware of a wholly new world. How faint were the things, and uncomely, that she had suspected in her virginal ignorance! Innumerable new perceptions crowded upon her as she felt the vibrations upon her nerves of the complex symphony of love. . . .

Julian had brought a boxful of books, and in the morning they usually read together. He preferred verse in these days, as more consonant with his mood, reading to her Rossetti's sonorous sonnets with a broad insistence upon their deep vowel-music. He tried one morning to read her his favourite passages of Wordsworth, but his voice trailed off into silence. The austere clarity of the great verses seemed like a rebuke. They had been up late the night before and she was tired. Drowsily her head leaned upon his shoulder, her soft hair touched his neck, and her breath his cheek. From her body, clad in a light morning-gown, arose a troubling scent of perfume. A dimness came over his eyes, and the hand in which he held the volume of Wordsworth trembled. He removed her head gently from its resting-place and walked up and down the rooms. She followed his steps from under half-closed lids. During the last weeks she had

grown plumper, and as she reclined there, half-asleep, her round neck and bosom partly exposed, she seemed to him to exhale an air of mere satisfied instinct.

"Frances, would you care to go out?"

She opened her eyes a little wider.

"No; I'm so sleepy."

"Oh, you can sleep in the afternoon. Come now; it's cool and clear outside."

She was querulous with drowsiness.

"Please leave me alone, Julian. You know I'm tired."

More luxuriously she nestled into her chair. She closed her eyes, and to his strained nerves it seemed that her face, in this somnolent repose, was almost stupid. Its relaxation irritated him.

"I wish you would rouse yourself, Frances. It strikes me that you're tired very often when I ask you to do anything sensible."

She sat up.

"Whose fault is it?"

"Yours! You seem gradually to be losing every activity, every sane interest."

"One is hardly inclined to sane activities when one is a man's mistress."

She could have struck herself for uttering the

words, so foolish and vulgar they seemed to her ear. But why would he not let her rest? She *was* tired—oh, so tired!

"My dear," he said coldly, "you are evidently not in a fit state this morning to discuss anything."

He took up his hat and gloves and went out.

She felt only an immense relief at his departure. Now she could sleep, and every fibre of her body seemed to cry out for deep and dreamless rest. With eyes half closed, she went into the sleeping-chamber, threw herself on the bed and forgot all things. It was near noon when she awoke, and her first memory was of the ugly and violent words she had spoken. She could not account for them. True, she had been desperately sleepy and angry at being disturbed. But this would hardly explain so strange a thing. The more she thought, the coarser and more hateful the saying seemed. She hoped that Julian had forgotten, but she could not believe that he had. It was just such a remark as her mother would have made, and she wondered whether in her, too, slept the seeds of acerbity, unreason and violence. She took the cold bath for which in the morning she had been too weary, and dressed herself in a graceful, dark frock. She looked at herself in the mirror of the dressing-table and was satisfied.

Every trace of listlessness and lassitude had passed.

Just before it was time for luncheon, Julian came in with alert step. He was in better spirits than he had been for some days, but he hardly looked at her.

"I've been out walking with Held," he announced briskly. "The fellow may be a cad, but he certainly knows his business. We've been talking shop, and he's been giving me some hints on short-story technique. I think I can develop an idea which has been bothering me a long time. I never, somehow, could find the inevitable form that it must take."

He started off to wash his hands and face.

"Time for luncheon, I suppose, and I'm hungry."

She was hurt—foolishly, no doubt—that he had not noticed the change in her and that he had not kissed her. She was hurt—and this seemed almost monstrous to her—that he had forgotten their scene that morning. She had been prepared to admit herself in the wrong, to be kissed and petted and forgiven. And the matter had been of so little import to him that he had not, in all probability, given it a second thought. Nor did he now remark

upon her silence. During luncheon he was pre-occupied, and Held looked at him, half-humourously, with his glittering, blue eyes.

Julian had scarcely swallowed his last bite when he hurried away. He looked at her hesitatingly just for a second.

"I shall try to do some work this afternoon, Frances."

She nodded, but found it difficult to keep her self-possession. She felt herself suddenly dismissed, abandoned, and shut out from his life. And, to her shame, the wide, blue eyes across the table, uncannily intelligent, seemed to understand the situation perfectly. She laid down her knife and fork and declined some fruit which the woman with the melancholy, brown eyes held out to her. The smallest morsel would have strangled her now.

After luncheon she went out on the verandah and gazed seaward through a blur of foolish tears. She had not the instant self-command of a woman living under unaltering social constraint, and Held, loitering here, detected the tears in her eyes. He laid his firm, white hand lightly upon her arm.

"My dear Mrs. Ware, there are facts which it is quite fatal to rebel against. They are of such surprising solidity. And, after all, why should you?"

She had not the social adroitness to repel his impertinence. His voice was naturally high and shrill, but he knew how to restrain and modulate it.

"A woman," he continued, "who has no rival but a man's art is, as the world goes, lucky enough."

She was too interested to be discreet, and his words had a temperate reasonableness which appealed to her. A man who brought this disinterested spirit to such problems could be trusted.

"No doubt you are right," she said, "but the first perception hurts, for all that."

Something not unlike pity subdued the blue eyes.

"How inexperienced you are to be surprised and hurt. Didn't you expect it?"

"No."

In spite of herself her lip trembled.

He drew up a couple of wicker-chairs and they sat down.

"May I smoke?"

She nodded.

"We try to live our dreams," he said softly, "and we always fail. The artist alone succeeds, in a measure, and will not barter his dream-life for beauty or wealth or love."

"Not even for love?"

"Least of all; for if he gives his art for the sake

of love, the gift is irrevocable. He may appear to sacrifice his art; he may persuade himself, in some brief hour, that he can sacrifice it. But he cannot."

"Not even to his—wife?"

"No; but his wife can still be measurably happy since he returns to her at the call of deep instincts, social and personal." The blue eyes flickered strangely. "But let us pity the poor woman who must hold him without acknowledged claims!"

She felt herself growing white under that gaze that seemed to read her soul. And his words were of such sad sincerity that fear of her whole fate overmastered her. She wanted to escape. But again he laid his light hand on her arm.

"Why should you disturb him at his work? It will only make things worse."

She sank back into her chair. His eyes looked dreamily over the waters.

"There is nothing so pitiless as the love of woman. It gives us much, but it would withhold the one thing which we dare not lack—the undisturbed life of our own soul. If you leave Ware alone, he will love you in the hours which he can give to love; if you rob him of peace in the hours which he must not give, he will hate you."

She turned her face away and the low voice at her side continued:

"The man who does not marry the woman he loves . . . invites his doom. Were he to marry her, she would not suffer the fever to possess him wholly at every moment. Her hold upon him would be of an ultimate security and she would not rob him and herself of peace. I am infinitely careless of society and its claims; I acknowledge no law but the law of my needs; but I would not dare to live with a woman and not marry her. No legal bonds are of such crushing fierceness, no convention is so throttling, as these lawless fetters. If one is married one can at least—get a divorce."

It took all her power of self-control to speak with impersonal calm.

"And this is your defence of marriage?"

"It is. You think it a defence upon low grounds? Dear lady, what is low, what is high? One must live with the least possible friction. Practise that and you will be happy as I am."

"Are you happy?"

His smile was radiant.

"Perfectly."

There seemed to her something repulsive in his brilliant gracefulness and his blue eyes. And yet,

it was with an effort that she arose. He opened the door for her and she passed into the house. Then, suddenly, his words smote upon her. Was she, to any extent, in this man's power? Surely he was unscrupulous. She would tell Julian and they might go away. The old cry arose to her lips: "How difficult life is, how difficult. . . ."

She was a little dazed by all she had heard. It revealed to her her own piteous inexperience of the problems of personal intimacy between men and women. She had never dreamed that such an intimacy raised any problems but purely external ones. To love, to be beloved—was not that a sufficient basis for enduring content? It must be, she thought, in spite of Held's subtleties, that "love is enough." The region of a delicate and largely intellectual adjustment of relationship, which he had opened to her, seemed unspeakably repulsive, cold and ungenerous. She and Julian, who truly loved each other, had no need of such repressions and artifices.

She found him engrossed in his task at the small desk in the sitting-room. Despite her rebellion against Held's advice, she hesitated to disturb him, but once more with a feeling of loneliness went out on the narrow balcony. The scarlet glare of the

sun had just dipped behind the purple line of the low, wooded islands that hemmed the bay, but his rays, of an unearthly rosiness of colour, illumined huge masses of white clouds towering above the horizon. Frances watched the drifting dreamland of the argent clouds, which now seemed a visionary city with rosy cupolas and soaring spires, and now, shifting its formation, a range of happy mountains where rose and silver peaks led into Paradise. But the earth turned its face more and more from the glowing west, the clouds grew dim and ominous and leaden, and she was afraid that from her own life its brief radiance would fade. She wanted to be loved and comforted and reassured.

She went to Julian and bent over him.

"When will it be finished?"

He restrained a movement of impatience.

"Finished? Why, I'm working at the first outline."

"But you've done enough for to-day. Come; I'm so lonely."

He bit his lip, but arose.

"I'll rest a bit, but I must get back to it while I have a grip on it."

He sat down in an easy-chair and stared into the room before him while the dark drifted slowly in.

She came and nestled to his side. His hands seemed cold and she pressed them close to her bosom. Then she put her head on his shoulder and was content. She had been so lonely and sick at heart that it was wonderfully sweet to be thus encompassed by his presence, and she crept still nearer to him. Thus they sat in the dusk and the tingling silence. Suddenly he drew his hands away and arose, and even in the dim light of the room she could now discern a strange anger in his eyes.

"Frances," he said, and his anger seemed to choke him, "you must not tempt me when I'm trying to work. There are other things in the world . . ."

"I never meant to——"

"It does not matter what you meant. The result is the same. When I am at work I do not wish to be disturbed. You used not to be so devoid of intellectual resources. Can't you employ yourself for a while?"

She was overwhelmed by his cold rage and the harshness of his words, but she understood now—so well, so tragically well.

"Julian, whatever I had done you would not use that tone to me if I were your wife. It is bitterly unjust, it is horrible and wicked of you to

make me suffer for the sin which I committed for your sake."

He looked at her hopelessly.

"If you can explain to me any conceivable connection between my not wishing to be disturbed at my work and our being married or not, I should be obliged."

"It is not that, but your whole attitude shows that you don't respect me. And the reason is, of course, that we are not married."

"I thought you had rid yourself of these intolerable follies. Do you respect me?"

"Surely."

"Well, I am not your husband. You are not my wife and still I respect you. Respect is given to a human personality, not to an official status."

"And do you think it quite the same for both of us?"

"Quite."

She shook her head sadly.

"It isn't, Julian; it isn't. I don't know why or how, but I feel it clearly."

"You are simply rooted in the vulgar officialisms and domesticities of the bourgeois class."

"Would I have come with you if that were true?"

"Such cases have been known. But I thought you were different. I am sorry and disappointed."

He settled down again at the desk and did not look up when the dinner-bell rang. For a while the clock on the mantel-piece ticked horribly through the silence. Then he turned around.

"Aren't you going to dinner?"

"Alone?"

"And for Heaven's sake, why not? If I happen not to be hungry . . .? We are not galley-slaves, tied to the same oar."

She was herself anything but hungry, yet she thought it wiser not to resist. She dressed and went downstairs. Miss St. Preux, who sat next to her at table to-day, looked at her frequently.

"You look pale, Mrs. Ware. Are you not well?"

The voice was warmly sympathetic, full of womanly kindness, and Frances looked up gratefully.

"No; I don't think I am well."

The old lady saw the distressed look in her neighbour's eyes and divined much.

"Come and sit with me awhile after dinner," she said.

XIII

MISS ST. PREUX was not a garrulous person, but to-night she talked in a clear, thin stream of kindly anecdote and gossip to the young woman by her side. The moral which, with unexpected lightness of touch, she insinuated, was that by forbearance, by forgiveness, by believing the best, and trusting, even when to trust seems foolish—that by these things alone the rare miracle of human content is compassed. She spoke of her own brilliant youth, of the desolation suddenly wrought by the war, of descending from the sheltered heights of wealth and distinction to earn a living by her needle; she spoke of patience, of renunciation, of the sustaining power of a conscious submission to the will of God. And it seemed to Frances that beside the immaculate flame of this noble and simple spirit, her own life stood out tarnished and ignoble. She felt herself rebuked and touched when, near ten o'clock, Miss St. Preux passed a caressing, old hand over her cheek and bade her good-night.

There was a vague stirring in her as of something that called for light and dominance. She was dissatisfied with herself and her future—that golden future of which she had dreamed with such deep luxury of joy. It seemed to her, strangely, above all things, that she feared the touch of Julian's body against hers, and that she would have been glad that night to sleep alone, afar off, beside some icy mountain pool under the cold stars. The soft beauty of their rooms seemed repulsive to her. With the abiding instinct of humanity, pitiful and sublime, not to relinquish its hold upon high dreams, she attributed her sudden reaction to all noble impulses, ethical and spiritual only—not to its true source, a passing satiety of the senses. Nor did she suspect that the same cause was at the root of Julian's sudden and fierce absorption in the things of the intellect.

She found him still awake and dressed, calm but tired. He turned to her with a wistful smile.

"Where have you been all the evening, dear?"

"Talking to Miss St. Preux."

He nodded approvingly. Then, with an impulsive movement, he caught her hands in his.

"Was I unkind to you to-day, dearest?"

She smiled at him through irrepressible tears.

"Forgive me, my little girl; forgive me. And don't attribute any significance to such things. I'm easily annoyed when I'm working; but we have done nothing except play too long. I must get back to my work; and though I fail a thousand times, I shall succeed at last. You must help me, sweetheart, and if the work goes wrong and I'm tired and irritable, be sorry for me and not angry. Will you?"

The appeal seemed fashioned for her present mood.


"I want to help you in all the best efforts of your life, Julian. I want to do that, above all things!"

He kissed her in gratitude and trust and friendship, and peace came into her soul.

Next morning at breakfast Held was voluble. It appeared that he had attended a prayer-meeting at a huge negro church the night before and had received a new sensation.

"It was superb," he declared. "The existence of such primitive fervour in this sophisticated age is not to be neglected. It was so strange and so beautiful that I wept."

A smile of incredulity passed around the table at the notion of Held's weeping. Only Miss St. Preux was grave.



"Do you think it admirable to laugh at the faith of simple souls?"

He turned to her suavely.

"You mistake my attitude entirely. The crudity of laughter at such things is behind me. They fill me with delicious wonder and all my primitive senses vibrate in sympathy."

But he had not satisfied Miss St. Preux.

"The old-fashioned unbeliever had, at least, the full courage of his negations. What have you?"

"Nothing, dear lady, except complete openness of mind."

"Without faith or hope."

"But with boundless charity."

"Even, unfortunately, for yourself."

He looked sullen at the laughter which heralded his apparent defeat. He pouted his full, red lips and his blue eyes looked angry. He turned to Ware.

"You agree with me?"

"Intellectually, yes. But my emotional attitude is different."

"Ah, you should see what I have seen. It thrills one ecstatically."

"I have no time at present," said Julian. "Would you like to go, Frances?"

"I should be so charmed to act as escort," Held broke in.

Frances hesitated; but remembering that, perhaps, Julian would like an entirely undisturbed evening of work, she consented to go, and he seemed quite content that she should. The woman of the sad, brown eyes ostentatiously dropped her fork clattering upon her plate, but a look from Held seemed to silence further demonstration on her part. Miss St. Preux frowned and Frances was aware that she was in the presence of some strange complication.

"We start immediately after dinner," said Held. "The meetings begin rather early."

Frances nodded assent.

All through the day she shivered at times in anticipation of the barbaric scene which she was to witness. She had no idea of what it would be like, but she discovered in herself a craving for excitement which might be satisfied. For Julian's sake, who was preoccupied, she tried to master her restlessness. But she did not want to think. It confused and hurt her in these days, and sad, dim, poignant memories came unbidden to darken for her the blue and gold of Queenshaven. . . .

The night air was mild and caressing when she met Held on the verandah.

"It is like a summer night," he said. "Let us walk."

"Is it far?" she asked.

"There are no distances in Queenshaven, nor in the world—at times."

She wanted to resent his impertinence. But the fear that evil knowledge of her and her fate might be his, came sickeningly upon her. For then he might, by a word breathed, shatter her content. And in spite of his words, his manner was elaborately courteous. His eyes were dark now and velvety; in their great, black pupils shimmered the dancing yellow flame of the street-lamps, and from them streamed a power to compel all languorous and alluring thoughts. Frances, her first fear banished, yielded to their beauty and to the charm of his artfully modulated voice. He was pleasant and interesting. She permitted her mind to dwell on nothing else.

The darkness in the Queenshaven streets was of a liquid softness that seemed to flood and eddy about house and wall and tree. And then the moon arose and the highest boughs of the trees flashed silver leaves in the light wind. They came

upon Marion Square, and here the great moon rode free in the sky, hanging for a moment like an aureole behind the grim head of Calhoun upon his tall monument. The great, silent space before the ancient barracks of the military school was bright with a pale, unearthly brightness, and so silent that they could hear across it the measured step of a single sentry by the iron gate.

Turning eastward into Calhoun Street, they were caught almost unawares in a stream of loudly chattering negroes which carried them, presently, to the door of the church. It was a large, pretentious building of red brick. But it was apparently incomplete, and on one side, where a tower should have been, a huge hole in the masonry was covered by a wooden shed. Held and Frances followed the crowd up an outer iron stairway and entered the church.

It was a huge hall, as well equipped as the average Protestant church in the South, but, unlike the temples of the dominant race, it bore signs of rough usage. Carpet and cushions were torn and the wood-work of the pews was covered by a thick film of nauseating grease. With hardly an empty space in the long pews, rose close-packed and seething in the warm, fetid atmosphere line after line of


faces, black and brown and yellow, already swaying here and there with a slow, rhythmic motion. Held and Frances had scarcely found a seat when an enormous quadroon, clad in a frock-coat that was green with wear, stepped on the carpeted platform and gave out a hymn. The organ that played the prelude was small and its reedy quaver disproportionate to the spacious room, but suddenly broke about them from a thousand voices the words of the song. It was a familiar hymn-tune, but never had Frances heard it sung in this fashion. Not only were the voices full of a wild fervour, but they transformed the strain into an echoing, melancholy wail that rose and receded, thrilled and quavered in poignant waves of indescribably troubling sound. At the close of each stanza the resonant voice of the preacher called out: "All sing! All sing! Glory be to Gawd!" And when the last stanza was reached, hands were clapping and feet tramping to the rhythmic beat, rise and fall of the innumerable voices.

The congregation knelt and the preacher prayed, communicating to the conventional verbiage that he used a plaintive appeal, and from here and there in the hall rose single voices, as he prayed, ejaculating: "Dasso!" "Amen!" "Oh, Lawdy, dasso!"

with fervent faith and gratitude. Another hymn was sung, followed by the sermon. The preacher used fairly correct English. His sentiments were threadbare, but through the discourse sounded a mad strain of incoherence and the man's voice rose in almost superhuman strength. By the mere volume of agonised sound he seemed to wish to drag sinners to repentance. He shouted echoingly of the saving blood of Christ, called upon his flock to bathe in that scarlet stream and cleanse themselves of sin. "An' ef you don't accept the glorious offer to come to Him and be clean, there's no hope for you—no hope—no hope!" The voice was full of wild sobs and lamentations as it repeated the words, and then without wavering it changed to an incomparable glory of exultation and sang, alone and unaccompanied by the organ:

"At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the light
And the burden of my heart rolled away,
It was there by faith I received my sight,
And now I am happy all the day!"

Voice after voice took up the strain until the church was again filled by the thrilling, maddening storm of music. The singers arose from their seats, threw up their hands, and turned up their



shining, black faces and dilated eyes. When the fervour was at its height the preacher raised his hand and commanded silence, for a space—the silence of unspoken prayer. . . .

Frances discovered, to her confusion, that she was clasping Held's hand. An emotional whirlwind seemed to have passed over her with little resistance on her part. She saw that her nails had wounded him. She must have been mad. But he would not let her speak. "Don't," he whispered. "Wait." Stirred though he was, he had himself well in hand, watching with infinite curiosity the beating upon his nerves of these barbaric emotions. But Frances felt herself, especially now in this tense silence, perilously adrift upon waves of sheer sensation. . . . From the silence, which seemed at length to grow intolerable with the suppressed travail of troubling ecstasy, burst a long, inhuman shriek. A thin, consumptive negro woman arose from her seat. The creature stretched her arms to Heaven, panted, and from her lips fell flecks of foam. "I see He, my Jesus! Yeh, Lawd, I come. Hallelujah!" Groans and cries answered her as she continued to pour forth a cataract of epileptic babbling, broken by wails and shrieks. Faster the words came and faster; her eyes became glazed; the

woman fell back lifeless; and over her surged another sea of chanting and clapping and trampling, and half-articulate sobbing cries: "She save'! Oh, Gawd! Hallelujah! She converted! Oh!—"

Without in the cool night air, Frances stood trembling. She had been able to bear no longer the waves of hysteria about her and had fled from the scene. Held followed her.

"You missed the best part," he said, "the last hymn."

She tried to regain her composure.

"It was horrible."

"But the pastor knows his business. Ah! that man is an artist in his way. The methods he uses are crude enough, no doubt, but how superbly effective!"

"Even you were moved."

"That is just it. So few things can move me."

She was still under the influence of the scene. All her nerves were preternaturally sensitive and Held's light touch upon her arm was like some exquisite pain. She had come lately to live in large measure in a conscious play of sensations, and this new effect was not unpleasant. The hand with which, occasionally, he touched hers, was cool and smooth and white as a girl's. She herself ached with sup-

pressed fever, and the coolness of his flesh appealed to her, refreshed her, as icy water would have healed the burning of her throat. Where was the ethical impulse, the clear beauty of calm thought of the night before? Her limbs throbbed, and it seemed to her that she must in truth be wicked and different from other women whom no wayward desires stung and no weakness rendered defenceless. She fought the sensuous thoughts that assailed her, barely listening to Held's talk; she tried to hurt herself by pressing a sharp ring she wore deeply into her flesh, but the pain seemed only to accentuate the craving of her senses. She strove to fix her mind on grave and piteous and tragic things, but the thoughts became a mere mechanical repetition of unspoken words and her true consciousness dwelt upon the fair boy at her side.

They came to the shore of the bay and stood for a little while leaning against the iron railing. The bright path of the moonlight lay upon the waters.

"Look closely," said Held. "The moon throws innumerable rings of burnished steel into the water, and when they touch the surface—they break."

She gazed into the brightness and saw that he spoke truly. Not only did the glittering rings break, but writhed like silver snakes upon the

waves. She gazed for a long time and her soul seemed to pass from her into the flashing play of the steel rings. She knew that Held was coming nearer to her, but she could not take her eyes away. He laid his cool cheek softly against her hot one. With a supreme effort she moved away.

"Oh, why did you do that?"

"It was such a little, harmless thing," he answered in his softest tone, "and you did not dislike it."

"It was hateful and insulting."

"It was not hateful to you, dear lady. You think that it should have been, of course. I know that. Nor was it insulting. But will you promise to forgive me if I promise to offend no more?"

She was tired of struggling. Everything seemed to conspire to bring into relief the baser qualities of her being. But flight, at least, was possible.

"Let us go."

It was not late and the windows of the Villa Mercedes were still like splashes of sharp yellow behind the sheltering trees. On the verandah Frances thanked Held in conventional words for his escort and went to her room.

As she passed through the softly carpeted upper hall a door opened and the stout woman of the sad,

brown eyes came out swiftly. She had on a loose dressing-gown.

"You have been out with Arthur Held?"

"I have. Why do you ask?"

"I want to warn you—you child. I know that he is evil through and through—merciless, brutal, depraved! You don't suspect it? No; his eyes are innocent enough. But don't let yourself be deceived! Don't . . .! I know . . . too well . . ."

It was crude and horrible and ugly. Frances tried to pass, but the woman blocked her path.

"Have you heard what I said?"

"Yes, yes; please let me go."

She was almost ashamed to go to Julian after all that had passed. But his whole attitude smothered remorse. He was sitting in his shirt-sleeves, lost over a pile of manuscripts, and held a brier-wood pipe firmly between his teeth. His hair was in disorder, his right hand slightly stained with ink, and he appeared to her suddenly as ugly and forbidding. Deliberately he completed the sentence he was writing and then swung around.

"Had an interesting evening, my dear? I've certainly had a profitable one. Well, aren't you coming to me?"

He kissed her and she tasted the acrid tobacco

on his lips. She could hardly restrain a movement of disgust.

"Oh, yes; it was very interesting, indeed. But I'm tired and I think I'll go to bed."

"All right, little girl. I won't just yet. I'm in good trim and it's only eleven."


She threw herself on her bed and cried softly, fearing that the sound might reach his ears. He did not care what became of her, whether she was happy or wretched, clean or defiled. He had his work, his detestable work. She almost hated him as she stared, sleepless, into the darkness.

XIV

WHATEVER had been its cause, the one hour of reaction against the influences that surrounded her had marked a period in the life of this woman struggling under the careless stars with the immemorial division in the life of man. Isolated and repressed from childhood by one of those pitiless accidents (economic in their origin) of modern society, she had cast off, in the strength of her youth and passion, the intolerable fetters. She had found a life of sensuous and sensual enjoyment; but her mate, with a man's indomitable strife after objective self-realisation, whether in words or iron or stone, had turned from her and left her in idleness with a hot yearning of the senses. But she had had one hour when the state of her body permitted her to divine that all was not right in her life and that a strong disgust at it could assail her. The hour passed and only its memory remained, dim but abiding. She endeavoured, as she saw herself gathered into a new entanglement of the senses, to recall

that clear, high, austere mood, but still in vain. It needed tongue after tongue of the elemental flame leaping from the furnace of life to purge her flesh and to establish the equilibrium between soul and sense, whose disturbance means death in life. . . .

She clung, in self-defence, to the idea that Julian was careless of her happiness and that he did not respect her because she was not his wife. In her heart she knew herself to be unjust, but she had a fund of useful feminine perversity with which to blind her eyes, voluntarily, and justify her ways. He seemed to be always at work, and when he was not, to want her to take long, bracing walks in the clear, mild Winter weather. And still her flesh ached with desire unsatisfied and she became querulous and reproachful. He looked at her with eyes so sorrowful, at times, that she wanted to cry on his shoulder and tell him of her confusion. But always Held's white face and blue eyes seemed to intervene, and the more she turned from Julian the deeper he, by a conscious effort, steeped himself in his work. He had no time to puzzle out what was happening: his task called him. Thus no outburst that might have cleared the atmosphere of their souls occurred and they passed each other brooding and with averted eyes.



One forenoon an explanation seemed imminent. She stood before him, completely exquisite, fastening her hat.

"Where are you going?"

"To see the works at the naval station."

"Alone?"

"No; with Mr. Held!" she defied him.

"Aren't you—"

He checked himself and a dull crimson rose into his forehead and receded. He got up and, as she drew on her gloves, opened the door for her.

"I beg your pardon, my dear. I hope you'll enjoy yourself."

But all that day Held found her listless and absent. She was trying to pierce the mystery of Julian's conduct, to weigh in her soul the motive that withheld him from being betrayed into any expression of jealousy. Did he suffer? Pray God that he did. Then all would be well—yet. . . .

At last Held became impatient. Their intimacy had proceeded by leaps in the last ten days.

"My dear Frances, you are unconscionably stupid to-day."

She looked at him, and he seemed puny and absurd with all his grace and youth. And for the

sake of this artificial boy she was making a strong man—the one man—suffer. She turned to Held.

"You will remember not to use my first name hereafter. I'm going home."

"So am I," he returned. "Perhaps you will feel more human to-morrow."

She was angry at his refusal to be rebuffed and spoke no word to him on their way back. She panted for the evening to come. Something must happen then, some word must be said to bring healing to the troubled heart. She would wring from Julian a confession of jealousy which would assure her of his love. She was hungry for such assurances, and he, though kind, was silent concerning the one thing upon which she craved expression.

At last they were alone together. Ages seemed to have passed in waiting for this moment, ages of alternate certitude and despair. Now she would hear him speak the word that would make all well. He seemed to divine from her restless eyes, from her movements, that some subtle crisis was at hand, and also to suspect something of its character, for notable lines of sternness curved about his mouth. She fluttered, with birdlike inconsequence, from place to place, object to object, and he sat silent and

watchful. Then, with a movement of petulance, she threw herself into a chair.

"I'm rather tired of Held's perpetual cleverness."

She had calculated with nicety how his retort, "Then why do you seek his society?" would at once open the flood-gates of her grief and fear and give him an opportunity of declaring his emotional attitude. Tensely she waited for his words. They came.

"But his cleverness is very genuine."

Then she arose in the violence of her weakness and defeat.

"You do not care where I go or what becomes of me. You are wholly selfish!"

"I care profoundly, dear. I care more for that than for anything else in life. But I am not your guardian. You are entirely free. The only compelling power that I admit is love. If you do not love me enough to prefer my society to another's, any words of mine would be not only superfluous, but impertinent. That—if you will remember—is the conception on which our union is based."

She came near to him for a last attempt. The words which he had spoken seemed to her senseless babble, irrelevant here and now.

"So, Julian, you are entirely removed from ordinary human feelings—such as jealousy?"

His hands jerked and his lips opened, but by a truly heroic effort he subdued his passion to the calm of his theory.

"My dear, jealousy presupposes a right of possession in another, regardless of the other's will or feeling. Such a supposition has always seemed to me monstrous. There can be no question of jealousy between us. So long as you love me I shall be glad. When you cease to love me I shall be sorry—but not jealous."

How she would have loved him had he arisen in the wrath of the primitive man and struck her to the earth, or had he given Held a drubbing with his nervous right arm and then taken her away. Her gorge rose at his apparently cold inhumanity. She had been right, evidently, in thinking that he did not care. No one, she thought—forgetting that for ideas men have died—no one who bore in his heart true love of any woman could speak thus. And so she left him alone in the corroding silence to which his theory condemned him. . . .

The next day, almost without warning, a party of wealthy tourists swooped down upon the Villa Mercedes, and Mrs. Pressley's hair seemed to emit

sparks of excitement. She whispered to Frances that these people were "tremendous swells" and that Mr. Held's influence in fashionable circles had brought them here. Upon the quiet dignity of Queenshaven life these newcomers showed like splotches of gaudy glare. Their movements were like the phantastic hurrying of figures in a kinematograph. They seemed utterly incapable of repose or thought. Queenshaven was to be "done"—with thoroughness. Skirts rustled uninterruptedly through the quiet corridors of the Villa; meals were served at all hours; before the gate wheezed and stank an abominable motor-car. The Boyds and Hochstetters called Held and each other by their first names and their voices rang continually through the house. Julian studiously avoided an introduction to them. The vulgarity of their kind was hateful to him. They seemed to him those phenomena of American life which, above all, a wise man must treat with contempt. As economic problems they had their importance, as human personalities they were unworthy of notice. But Frances, through Held, was drawn into the swirl. She was not lacking in sensitiveness to the desecrating noises of the horde amid the storied gardens of Queenshaven. But they offered her forgetfulness.

Lucy Boyd, tall, stout, dressed invariably in light-coloured silks, pronounced the city "slow." Why, she wondered in her unsubdued voice, had they ever come here. Fred Hochstetter ("*Changez les dames*" seemed their motto) passed his arm jocularly about her artificially diminished waist. "That precious husband of yours dragged us here. It's up to you to furnish us with amusement!" She did. Excursions were organised, mad rushes over space, whose purpose seemed not to be an enjoyment, but rather a weary necessity of noise and motion. Motor-cars whirled through the solemn woods, emerged unnaturally beside still creeks and far-spreading, yellow marshes from which the frightened marsh-hens rose with flapping wings; hollow chatter assaulted the calm splendour of setting suns over grey seas mottled with scarlet pools, and in the melancholy sweetness of dusk sounded the inexpugnable laughter of man.

Frances hated herself for sharing in this impious revelry, but a spirit of perverse defiance clouded her soul. An expression of irritation at the noisy restlessness of Mrs. Boyd, which slipped from Julian, seemed to sting her, and she defended her new friends with intemperate warmth. Julian lifted slow, sad eyes to her face. . . .

She hurried out and left him. She could not have told why she had spoken all these wild and foolish words—she only knew that she was wretched, body and soul, that her heart sickened, and that, somehow, Julian was at fault. Blind resentment against him followed, a boundless irritation at all his qualities of mind and body. And she was so tired, so tired. . . .

For that afternoon a sailing excursion had been planned and a small yacht hired. New awnings were spread over the clean-swabbed deck and tables and wicker-chairs placed on it. A refrigerator had been stored in the cabin and a case of champagne squeezed into it. Weather even milder than usual in Queenshaven, a sky of depthless blue, a level of windless water, rendered the day propitious.

They started out in the early afternoon from the harbour. A breeze from the northwest filled the sail, patched and gaudy, as of some phantastic Malay *prau* in the intolerable glitter of an Oriental ocean. The sapphire water washed with soft plashing about keel and sides; the motion was soft, languorous, dream-like; an immense quietude brooded over all things. No traffic disturbed the far serenity of the bay. Only here and there lay noiselessly at anchor a few graceful coasting ves-

sels, with sails furled and slender masts like black bars laid upon the horizon's boundless blue. The sharp, red roof of the lighthouse, the only touch of alien colour in that vast harmony of gold, sapphire and the olive of island forests, accentuated the luminous completeness of effect. They passed an ancient fort, passed reaches of yellow marsh broken by estuaries and glittering inlets, and landed upon a steep and wooded shore.

But it was cool in the sunless, half-drenched woods, and they determined to set sail once more and prepare a luncheon on deck under the glow of the westering sun. Various tins were extracted from the ice-chest, fruit, and the apparently inevitable bottles of champagne. Boyd and Hochstetter ate with the studied deliberateness of men performing a memorable action. Mrs. Hochstetter, who was thin and acrid, hardly tasted food, but Lucy Boyd stuffed herself to an accompaniment of shrill criticism on the scene before them. A morbid avidness of mere size seemed to mark her mental process. Queenshaven Bay was well enough, but she had seen—! Did they remember—?

Frances was thirsty and drank several glasses of champagne which Held, who was himself studiously abstemious, brought her. Soon a thin film

seemed to cover sky and water and all things to become unreal. She had the most absurd desire to wave her arms grotesquely; but, being fully conscious of the quality of the impulse, she restrained herself. The soft dark fell, and with it clouds drifted inland and swathed the sky, quenching the glow of sunset. Lucy Boyd, wrapt in her cloak, fell asleep. From the dripping prow came the voices of the two men and Mrs. Hochstetter, with a recurrent echo of the word "dollars," and in the stern Frances and Held were left alone—alone, as it seemed, in the opaque darkness, in which the lights of the city were like red and yellow holes punched into black velvet. The feeling of the unreality of all things had quite conquered her now. She knew that it was caused by the wine which she had drunk, but the knowledge was of no avail. She lay back in a low chair, wonderfully contented in this phantasmal world. In truth a feeling of fatuous satisfaction made her almost laugh aloud. She could not help tapping her hand merrily upon the side of the chair, and it was amusing that she could not always find the side, but often dropped her hand into empty space. She told Held about it and he joined in her amusement. Then she began to feel very sleepy and would suddenly fall fathom after

fathom into deep, strange, gorgeous dreams that lasted but a second and seemed to cast her forth again only half awake. Gradually the dreams grew a little longer, a little deeper. She stretched her limbs in luxurious rest. In her dreams she saw that amber moon which, on her first night in Queenshaven, had shone upon the balcony, upon Julian turning away from all that outer glory unto her. She saw him coming to her again, saw the strange fire in his eyes, felt his hand strong upon hers. . . . The grinding crash of the boat against the small pier flung her from her dream; Held's shoulder pressed hers, his eyes looked into hers, and, by the flicker of a lamp, she saw those half-closed, satyr eyes, those heavy lips half-open, that conquering smile. Her consciousness sprang up like an armed man. She had been weak, adrift upon a sea of dreams. What if the boat had passed a little longer on its gentle course, a little farther . . . ?

She pushed Held away and the pin of her brooch left a livid stroke on his pale cheek. Her knees shook with an indescribable horror and weakness as she saw him wipe a crimson drop from his face. He looked utterly repulsive to her in the faint light and she hated him and herself. Buried instincts arose in all their might. Though the irreparable had

not happened, though no legal bond united her to Julian, she knew herself akin to the woman whom Christ had not condemned. . . . She moved as in an evil dream. It was not she who answered the noisy chatter of her companions; her real self lay hidden deep below, withdrawn, stricken, shamed. It was some gibbering marionette in her form that walked by Held's side.

The lights of the Villa Mercedes came into view and she shuddered as with sudden cold. She spoke no longer. A numbing sense of failure swathed her soul, for had she not failed utterly in every relation of human existence to approach even a moderate standard of goodness? had she not been a faithless daughter? was she not, in the last analysis, a faithless wife? That was, then, what all came to—the dim yearnings of her girlhood, the fretting at life in her father's house, and love itself! It was all but the fruit of the corruption of her own black heart.

She came into the dimly lit rooms and saw Julian slumbering uneasily on a couch near his desk. He looked pale and worn and she pitied him. But she dared not waken him, for it seemed to her that now her touch must be polluting and the sudden feeling of kindness for him an unconscious self-deception. Later, when he arose and came into the bedroom,

she feigned sleep, though the pulses in her temples hammered and her brain was weary with thoughts going eternally the same round. How had all this come about? Why was it that she had so fallen, was so lost? She tried to scrutinise every thought, every emotion, of the past months, but she could find no continuity, no inevitableness, no law for evil or good, but only a blind and bitter whirl.

XV

THERE was no falseness in her plea next morning that she was ill. Her strained nerves had broken down and she felt weak and lost. Boisterous messages of sympathy came from below, but Frances heeded nothing. She watched Julian as he moved about the room in kindly ministration and condemned herself bitterly. But still she strove by a process of thought to discern the interconnection of the events and feelings that had brought her to this pass, and, failing still, came only to an overwhelming sense of the impermanence of all things, of the perilous fluidity of the very elements of human character. She dismissed, half-angrily, the brittle sophistries of a will potent, at all times, with no external aid, to realise itself in terms of life. Then her thoughts faded phantasmally into broken images of monstrous significance, and she clung desperately to Julian's hand in her rebellion against the tyranny of dreams. A physician summoned somewhat later in the day made light of her illness, but

spoke earnestly to Julian in going out. She half hoped that she might be very ill and thus gain long days of quietude and then a space of refreshing convalescence. But Julian seemed rather ill at ease than grave.

"What is it?" she asked.

"The doctor says you may get up whenever you feel strong enough, but that you must be careful of yourself, because—"

He seemed to grope for words and, holding her hand, looked away.

"Because—you are to become a mother."

She could have smiled at his helplessness before this phenomenon, so strange to his masculinity. But she was herself struggling against wave upon wave of a new and sweet perturbation.

"Did you not know?" he asked.

"No," she hesitated. "I had no one to consult. I suspected, but only at moments."

She closed her eyes, for she wanted to be alone with this thing. She was glad that its end was far off, when the stains of life would no longer rest so newly upon her. It would be Julian's child and hers. . . . Days passed and she was still too weak to go about, but sat by the window of her sitting-room and looked steadily out upon the bay.

A new and terrible care weighed upon her which no reasoning would put to rest. The child would be illegitimate. She was, after all, too firmly rooted in the conventions and domesticities of life to pass lightly over this fact. The anxiety kept her weak and languid, she grew thinner than was her wont, and watched the waters of the harbour with eyes in which fear dwelt. She ceased entirely to feel the beauty of what she looked upon—either in its supreme brightness or when an adamantine roof of slate-coloured cloud crept gradually over the harbour and descended slowly upon the horizon, narrowing the strip of bronze and blue between the flat islands and itself. But when the dimness was complete, then would she feel, at moments, a sad content. Voices floated to her from below, but she had no strength to gather their meaning. Her soul was concentrated upon itself and saw no hope. The child would be an outcast and she could not avert its fate, for she had, so tragically, lost all right of demand upon Julian. He cared for her as one might care for a dazed, sick child. How much he suspected of the devious ways into which she had drifted it was impossible to tell.

Very vaguely she had heard of the departure of

the Boyds and Hochstetters. But Miss St. Preux, who often came to spend an hour with her, had not dwelt on the fact. She dismissed these people and their doings with a little droop of her fine, old-ivory hand. Frances did not ask concerning Held, but she was sure that he was still here. The belief was confirmed, on a fair morning, by himself in person. He strolled lightly to her side of the balcony, having stepped upon it from the hall, and stood deliberately poised (he seemed hardly to rest on firm ground) before the window at which Frances sat. He had assumed an almost impalpable melancholy.

"I am going away," he announced softly. "I could not go without seeing you once more."

"It would have been better if you had."

"No; you are wrong there—oh, entirely wrong—for it seems that you have taken to heart a certain brief dream that received us for a little while in its magic embrace. Why regret these things? Do they not enrich life? And they—leave no mark."

Her eyelids trembled, in spite of herself, under his gaze. It was so utterly clear and calm.

"If one has no conscience, no shame . . ."

"My dear Frances, why drag these horrible,

big words into regions that lie on the farther side of good and evil? Can you define, in any way, the harm on which you insist?"

She pulled herself sharply together.


"Whatever makes one weaker to resist evil—that is bad. Whatever is another step lower in one's fall from good . . ."

"Good—good?"

"If you do not feel what it is, no one can help you. But please go! Don't you see that I am ill and weak?"

A faintness was coming over her. He went. But even then, with her eyes half-closed, she knew that his presence had evoked in her a clearer perception of her sin than any that the slow and silent hours had brought. . . .

The strength of her youth began to assert itself, despite the gnawing at her heart of pain and fear and remorse. But the stronger she grew, the more unbearable the gnawing seemed to become. The more clearly she discerned all that the past few months had brought about, the more it seemed to her to point, step by step, to a disintegration of her character, and the gradual acceptance of life on a lower and lower plane until, but for an accident, she might have committed an irreparable, unpar-



donable sin. She loathed herself, and was too inexperienced of the soul's life to draw from this very loathing the prophecy of her own salvation. Her life with Julian became a series of evasions, and still the strong bonds of his central principle of liberty in union kept him silent. Yet he evidently hungered after the old, dear intimacy. His work was complete; he had sent it out into the world to try its fortune, and had banished the care of it from his mind. She pitied him and felt her pity to be an insult; she loved him and thought her love, necessarily, false; she had no sense of the extremes of good and evil that co-exist in our hearts. Once only during these strange weeks did his restraint break down. It was evening, and they were alone; he came to her and gathered her in his arms. So sweet it was to rest there—yet she repulsed him, gently but definitely. He stood before her, pale and angry.

"We had better part," he declared abruptly.

She knew that he did not mean it, and was glad of the depth of feeling that prompted the words.

"Why?"

"Because every purpose of our union seems frustrated! I do not wish to become an object of disgust and terror to you."

She came to him, putting her hands gently on his.

"Dear," she said, "I love you—more, not less, than ever. You have been wonderfully good to me, patient with my waywardness, forgiving. . . . Won't you, for just a little while longer, let me walk alone? I want to regain—the right to be loved."

She did not realise how terrible her words seemed.

"I did not know you had forfeited the right!"

An agony of suspicion writhed in his face.

"Frances, it is not possible . . ."

She understood.

"Is it not possible to have sinned terribly against love and faith without . . ."

"Absolute shame?"

"Yes."

"Thank God!"

"You did not think . . ."

He bent down and kissed her hands in confession of contrition.

"There are men who have no experience," he said, "and they judge of others by an inner vision, as they are temperamentally inclined to faith or unfaith. And other men, like me, who have lived, who

have known—too much, perhaps—learn that there is nothing so lofty nor anything so base that it may not be true of anyone—spotless saint, vile sinner—in all the infinite variations of the moral gamut. They know that the purest woman *may* fall—once—and that the veriest wanton may, for a moment, enter heaven and hear the angels sing.”

He went toward the door.

“You will forgive me, dear?”

She nodded. Her shame kept her silent, for only the breadth of a hair had divided her from the final sin. She hid her face when he was gone and yearned for some lustral waters into which to plunge, to emerge clean in spirit, and then—to seek him.

The day was of a rare gloom and loneliness. It was Sunday—always a day of extreme calm in Queenshaven, but this time of an oppressive quietude. The darkness of afternoon stole in through the windows, and Frances felt the fear of it and of being alone with her own soul. She dressed in a grey, nun-like gown and went out.

The streets lay in a haze of vague melancholy as in a Northern Autumn, and Frances walked along in the dim light, unseeing. She could only brood over the restless horror within. Memories

came to her—poignant, pitiful, cruel—which would not let her go, but enslaved her with relentless power, until one arose in which a touch of healing seemed to dwell. It was the memory of her girlish longing for spiritual repose under the shadow of the Church. Was it too late now, in her great need, to turn to the visible embodiment of the Eternal Love? The thought seemed wonderfully exalting, and her immediate impulse carried her along until she found herself kneeling in the dark nave of a small but beautiful Catholic church—one of the few basilicas in America. It wanted still half an hour to the period of the vesper service, but already here and there knelt a quiet, moveless figure with eyes fixed, through the gloom, upon the crimson glimmer of the eternal lamp that threw a faint ray upon the mild face of the Redeeming Lord, or with head bowed in contrition on the wooden pew. Frances knelt, too, and the heavy scent of the flowers floated to her from the white marble altar. The undying appeal of the ancient faith, in its full rigour, came to her. Oh, to cast off one's burdens here at the foot of the Cross; to solve, by one glorious acceptance, all the difficulties of life; to lay down all sins, all yearnings, all fears, all uncertainties; to be upborne by

the Eternal Strength; to rest in the love and boundless compassion of the Everlasting Arms! All her soul melted in a divine tenderness and she wept. If only the dreamy statue yonder could quiver into life, could descend and stride down the aisle; if only she could touch the garment of the living Saviour, and kiss His feet, and be made whole! She knew, even in her ecstasy, that without this supreme miracle no lasting help could come to her; that she was of her age, weak of faith and under the tyranny of the troubling intellect. But, for an hour, at least, she had found rest. . . .

A red-robed acolyte stole softly from the vestry and passed behind the silver altar-railing. He knelt before the shrine of the Eucharist, and the light of the long taper which he held shone faintly on his delicate boy's face and soft hair. He lit taper after flickering taper until the white altar seemed dressed in brilliant, yellow gems. Frances stared at the mystical flames till consciousness shrunk to its lowest ebb and her soul seemed alone in the universe with the strange altar-lights. Then, apparently from far away, in small and wistful tones, floated the strain of the hidden organ, and through the vestry-door walked to its measure, in slow and solemn procession, acolytes—grave children swing-

ing fuming censers or bearing tall candles—followed by the celebrant priest.

The immemorial mystery of the Mass enfolded her, softened her heart, and through its accessories spoke imperiously to her senses. The candles flickered faintly through cloud after white cloud of incense that rose from the censers, which, as they swung to and fro, clinked softly. Gold glittered in cruciform lines upon the mystical vestments of the priest: the glitter fascinated her, the incense sank heavily upon her senses, but, deep below, the pure emotions were stirred by the solemn roll of the organ that seemed to raise her upon the wings of one of God's great angels, even to the foot of the Throne. The bell sounded; the people bowed; the Host soared. Her blood leapt to greet the sacred Flesh of the Divine Presence, and she knew a moment of complete ecstasy. . . .

She stood at the door of the church, all her nerves vibrating. A master-hand had struck them into endless tremours. Dream, vision and divine gladness vanished, or remained behind in the velvet gloom of the nave: she was conscious only of the trembling nerves, the senses imperiously summoned to power, the resistless call of her blood. She had

sought consolation, and what had come to her was the old fever. So potent it was that it dimmed her sight to the beautiful light and shade of the Queens-haven dusk, to the bronzed waters of the bay, the gently waving trees, the pearl and amber and crimson of the western sky. For the clouds had parted and the evening sky looked clear and fresh.

Her soul was silent. Against her will rose from her throat tender words between a croon and a sob. She hurried up the white steps that led to the portico of the Villa Mercedes, but all was empty there. Then she ascended the stairs, and, through the open door, saw Julian sitting alone in the twilight. She stood still upon the threshold—eager, deep-breathing, erect.

He turned to her, but at the look in her eyes the words he was about to speak faded into the stillness of the evening. He arose, and she came to him, nearer and nearer, until her hands rested upon his shoulders. Then he found words.

"You have come home to me, dearest?"

"I have come home to you. . . ."

The stars burned over their second nuptials, and they were once more alone with each other in the homeless universe. They heard only the song of

their blood, the rhythm of their pulses; they saw only love glimmering under trembling eyelids and upon fervid mouth. Midnight brought them no hint of an awakening; dawn did not declare upon them the judgment of the light.

XVI

BUT Frances knew that she was living merely the life of the body, and that even the magic of that life had departed. Indulgence bred indulgence. They were both weary of the struggle in their own hearts; and so their existence became like that of most people, since they strove no longer against the unspiritualised ardour of the sense. Gradually, thus, little courtesies and reticences departed—signs of a pure and imaginative conception of love—and they became immersed in an habitual practice of rites now grown profane. To the man and artist—artist, though thwarted and not fully articulate—this state of things involved no deep humiliation. To him were left the constant and severe activities of his intellect, through which, for hours daily, he rose to a higher plane. To her, whose love was also her life (not any portion of it whose quality other aspects might redeem), came a dull, throttling sense of utter degradation and defeat.

Her girlhood called to her. Its cloistral dreams now appeared before her in vision as part of a beautiful, irrevocable past. Then, at least, she had had her dreams; she could let her thoughts play about a future of her own imaginative creation. Now reality had robbed her of any power over her own life. In dreams alone lay true freedom. All vistas were closed. On what should she exercise desire or hope? She must grope on between the unassailable walls that had risen about her—on to the sordid and bitter end. Such are the sorrows of youth—so hopeless, so complete. Any hint of the fortifying truth that all things are outlived and overlived, that the human soul has an infinite capacity for adjustment and readjustment—any hint of this last fruit of experience is rigidly withheld.

And so, for the second time since her flight, she wrote to her mother. It was a faltering letter, whose words trembled from line to line upon the brink of passionate confession and grief. It was not pride that prevented Frances from an avowal of defeat; it was the certainty—the old, appalling certainty—that her words would be distorted into something infinitely below their intention. And yet she wrote on, wanderingly, and wise eyes might

have discerned there a piteous wistfulness, a craving for comprehension and spiritual rest.

Impossible plans suggested themselves to her, such as making a confession of her unhappiness to Miss St. Preux. But at once her soul shrank back in its humiliation. How should she formulate her ignoble cares to this serene, pure mind, whose very existence rebuked her once again? She could not speak to Julian. He seemed to her gross, hard, definitely and abominably masculine. Signs of jealousy in him, for which—so few weeks before—she had yearned, now became hateful. She no longer desired to be possessed or claimed. The service of love was no longer a perfect freedom, but a cruel compulsion. The desire to escape from his unconscious mastery over her through her senses became dominant, and she sought, helplessly and blindly, for means of flight. She awaited with growing anxiety an answer from her mother, deluding herself, against her better knowledge, with the hope that thence some help might, after all, spring.

Some perception of her state, dim and uncertain, must have come to Julian. He made efforts, generally futile, to break through the barriers of her great preoccupation. He was interesting himself in the local history of Queenshaven, spent many

hours going through the library of the Historical Society, and gathered notes with vague plans of future work. He attempted to draw her into the circle of his studies. In vain. Thus arose in him a slight contempt for her lack of intellectual interests. He wronged her: elemental man and woman, stripped bare of all superficial complexities, confronted each other again, in their eternal enmity—he striving to give reality to the conceptions of his intellect, she to the hopes of her heart.

It grew colder in Queenshaven. The days were still of blue and gold, hardly paler than in Summer, but mornings and evenings were cold. The lower temperature made itself more intensely felt here than in more Northern latitudes, and Frances sat alone before the small grate, watching the blue flames dance on the fiery coals. She experienced a feeling of mental blindness—a new feeling. She knew she could not see things as they really were; that she was often unjust in her thoughts, erratic in her emotional life. But she could not rise above this perception of her own state or attain to any clarity of vision. A new humility entered her heart; not the old feeling of humiliation, but a sense of her own faultiness that seemed to purge her soul. She waited for Julian, not knowing in what man-

ner to communicate to him all that was passing within her, but trusting to the moment's chance and mood.

He came—a little tired and dispirited. If he had spoken first her words would have come with more difficulty. But he sat silent, leaning his head upon his hand.

Julian," she said, "why cannot we be happy?"

He looked up, smiling wanly.

"What a question! If only I knew!"

She leaned forward in her seat.

"I know I've been unreasonable . . . that I've hurt you often; but *I* have been hurt myself."

He covered his eyes once more with his hand.

"Can't we forgive each other?" she asked all but inaudibly.

"Forgive? forgive? What does that mean? That does not help us. I love you, and, therefore, in a sense, I forgive you all wrongdoing, because I feel tenderly toward you—always. But does that save the future? Does that stamp out the seeds of discord? Shall we hurt each other, and then, in a softer mood, forgive each other again and again to the end of time? Is that sane, I ask you, and is it—worth while?"

"After all, then, you do not love me?"

A profound discouragement seemed to come over him.

"Dear, if you were only less—a woman. You do not even try to understand me."

"But what's the use of trying to understand if you will not forgive me?"

"I forgive you," he said, but there was no peace in his voice.

They were both silent and estranged. Neither had the gift of facile and moving speech by which to understand and console the other. In both there was an element hard, unyielding, and stonily silent. Thus began another period in which each seemed to the other a shadow passing and repassing before eyes that saw not, in which life became to them a weary dumb-show behind which lay misery and yearning.

In Frances' consciousness a flame, once burning only like a shadowy gem, burst into flare and seemed with its fierce glow to illuminate her whole nature. Since all efforts failed; since, despite their love, no word or act seemed potent over the gradual estrangement between them; since all had come to naught, and since she could trace her sorrows to no visible cause—it came to her, with new and terrible force, that their sin was being visited upon

them; that all suffering sprang from the absence between them of the bond approved and tested by the ages and required by the laws of God and man. It was a blind belief that came to her. She did not bow before the reasonableness of the law, but before its terrors and its revenge.

She was not permitted of her own will to give any active expression of her belief. The brutally cruel consequences of a careless moment robbed her of power.

Always afterward she remembered that morning. It came to her many times and far away in dreams of the night; it grew to a phantasmal scene in which all details became exaggerated and monstrous. . . . Across the sunshine of the Villa Mercedes the shadows of the columns fell like black shafts. Her eyes were dazzled and she could discern in the brightness of the street only a shifting line of bluish grey—a postman, but in her feverish memories of that morning, a fatal messenger. He came up the steps of the portico and touched his cap. Had there been in his smile a strange and subtle irony? She remembered his teeth—large and white, laid bare by that mysterious smile. He took one from the package of letters that he was gathering for the negro butler on the porch.

"Is this right? 'Miss Frances Garnet, care of Villa Mercedes'?"


She had made a step forward; then had remembered, and, growing pale, had held back. An immense nausea had risen in her breast, and before her eyes the trees and bushes had danced grotesquely. But the inexorable butler, having seen her movement, had brought the letter to her. She had clutched it. Then, shivering, she had looked about and had seen upon Mrs. Pressley's mobile face a deep red of anger. A shadow had passed between her and that condemning countenance, a hand had been laid on her arm, and she had heard—and heard forever afterward, as the one thing of comfort in that clamorous and garish day—the voice of Miss St. Preux.

"Go upstairs, my poor child. They suspected your misfortune. I'll help you—all I can."

Frances had gone to her room and lain down on the bed. The horrible sickness, the oppression in her breast, the dazzling in her eyes, had continued. She had felt, in that hour, the touch of open shame, and it had struck her down. . . .

She never asked, nor did Julian tell her, in what manner Mrs. Pressley communicated to him the fact that under these distressing circumstances she

could no longer offer them the hospitality of the Villa Mercedes. He seemed, in truth, unwilling to discuss the situation, but went about with an air of defeat. They were to go as soon as possible; but he left all the final arrangements to her, going only to procure the tickets against their departure. He seemed to brood confusedly upon many problems, but he was sparing of words. Frances herself did not feel the strength to enter with him upon any explanation. Passing and repassing the mirrors in her rooms, she saw her pale, drawn face and the deep terror in her eyes. She felt as though she must hide her face from the light of day, and creep away into some dark, cool corner, away from the seeing eyes and pitiless words of men. She read and re-read the letter that had caused the catastrophe. She had not doubted, even in that tragic moment, under the portico, that it was from her mother; that only her mother could have been guilty of a mistake so crude. Yet she read the faltering sentences with deep emotion. Mrs. Garnett was, evidently, more acutely unhappy than she had been in the old days; unhappy, too, with a dumb wretchedness unlearned in the subtleties of grief, and hence completely defenceless. From this letter, too, Frances received an impression of her father



that brought her the relief of tears. "Father," wrote Mrs. Garnett, "looks so tired that I get worried about him. He hardly eats; and, what is worse, scarcely talks at all. I believe that he longs to hear from you, but forces himself to say nothing. . . ."

They went, unfriended and alone, saying no farewells, but in the manner of fugitives. Strangely enough as it seemed to Frances, though in truth by a common accident, it was again the *Sequoia* that lay beside the clamorous pier and received them. They had not long to wait. With a slow, stately motion the steamer swung from its moorings and passed down the bay. The city grew smaller and smaller upon the horizon, until its houses and steeples looked like the wooden chalets of a Swiss toy-box; the shore-line of the islands grew thin and faint; the smooth stones of the great breakwater flew behind, and the ship adventured once more, with its freight of human souls, upon the turbulent sea.

Of late it was the passing of things, whether fair or otherwise, that seemed to Frances unspeakably tragic; and, though she had suffered in this city of Queenshaven, though she had moved in it beset by doubts and sorrows, by a great confusion both in

outer things and in her own heart, its passing from her eyes left her in a blank despair. Nor, at this moment of departure, could she see anything in the eye of her mind but the gentle beauty of its ways, feel anything but the peace of its supreme repose, or call to memory aught but the brief hours of impassioned happiness that had been hers amid its winds and under its great stars.

She looked at Julian, who stood next to her by the railing, but found no consolation in his sombre eyes. She laid her hand on his arm.

"We have failed—so far," she said.

"We? Perhaps all the others have failed in their relations toward us."

"But what does it matter?" she cried. "Oh, God, what one wants is a little untroubled happiness—"

"At any price?"

"The price that all men pay, and all women. How do you know that you are wiser or better than they, that you should have the right to decide differently?"

"Have you forgotten . . ."

"What you have seen? What you have known? No; but look at us, see what it has brought us to—your wretched experience."

He turned to her coldly.

"The seed of our failure lay in your soul—in your attitude—not in our actions. You never truly assented to our union—upon these terms. You had your reticences, your silent conditions; you hoped, after all, for the ordinary domestic hearth. Answer me, Frances; did you or did you not?"

"I have always hoped—"

"And why?"

"Because I felt—felt that we were wrong, from the very first!"

"And you oppose that mere feeling to my experience, to my arguments?"

"Arguments, arguments—I will argue no more."

He looked at her earnestly and stroked her hand. Then he turned away and began to pace the deck with rapid strides.

XVII

FRANCES sat in the dingy room of a New York boarding-house. The windows gave upon a small square of paved yard, upon huge poles connected by clothes-lines, upon a single stunted tree whose limbs were so contorted that they appeared to writhe in endless agony, and upon a narrow space of iron-grey sky. She wondered, not for the first time, why Julian had chosen this place, and every answer to the question was a disheartening one. The house had that ultimate obscurity which belongs to the perfectly common, touching neither poverty nor wealth, virtue nor vice: the house itself, the room, the street, were indistinguishable from an hundred others. Their secret—Julian's and hers—was safe here. Ah, that he should be so careful of it, so unwilling, apparently, to brave the slightest external consequence of their love—this was almost the only thought which could yet touch her heart, so learned in the curiosities of grief.

The darkness of the Northern Winter fell early,

but she was too tired to light the gas. Of late Julian had often absented himself from her for many hours, and she had learned to bear his neglect with a dull patience. The flame and energy of her girlhood seemed to have passed away, and she felt herself becoming a tired, disappointed woman, bearing a hidden shame in her heart. Her indeterminate ethical impulses seemed to have led nowhither, all her hopes to have failed, all sources of consolation to have been sealed.

One pleasure remained to her, strange and pathetic: to haunt, on early afternoons, the streets and squares which she and Julian had trod together in the dying Summer. Wandering here, she no longer recognised the city she had known. It hung before her, an ugly, modern *Fata Morgana*; but etherealised and transfigured by a miraculous atmosphere. The ways that they had not known clung to the flatness of the earth. But the ways, few as they were, that they had known together reeled in the Winter air under some solemn enchantment. She felt, at this time, no poignancy of grief or of regret; but haunted, with a strange tranquillity, the city of her lost romance. One thing alone stirred her more deeply—the music of the hurdy-gurdies. They still played the same wailing tunes

that she and Julian had heard together. Then they had scarcely been articulate to her ear; now, like the scents of perished days, mournful and troubling past endurance, they crept into her nerves.

Of human companionship she had little and wanted less. Mrs. Walker, who kept the boarding-house, a loud, stout, faded woman, often came into her room, and Frances bore the disturbing presence quietly. The woman came now, following immediately her light knock at the door. She wore a draggled skirt and a soiled white jacket; her hair was dishevelled and her teeth yellow. She looked about her with eyes at once hard and restless.

"Aren't you coming to dinner, Mrs. Ware?"

Frances looked up.

"I didn't know the bell had rung."

Mrs. Walker shook her large head and her eyes glistened.

"Yes, dearie, I know the feeling. We all have troubles. But you mustn't forget your dinner. You're not as bad off as me."

Frances submitted.

"You have had sorrows?"

"Gracious! I never thought when Mr. Walker was alive that I'd have to keep a boarding-house and drudge for others. And my daughters have

left me—both of them treat me coldly. Now, can you understand that, Mrs. Ware? Can you understand such heartlessness?”

Tears rolled down accustomed grooves in the woman's face. In spite of them, there seemed in her tone something mechanical, as though she related her sorrows habitually and in the same words.

“When Mr. Walker was alive,” she went on, “things were different. He was a noted lawyer, you know, and of a good family—one of the best families in New York, counted among the swellest people. We used to live on Grammercy Park. And when he came home in the evening we used to sit in the drawing-room and smoke. He liked me to smoke. He used to say it gives a man a feeling of companionship. We used to be so cosy before the fire—and now I have to go and attend to my boarders; and Kate—that's my oldest daughter—you ought to see her, Mrs. Ware; she's so lovely, and I love her, however much she neglects me—now Kate comes to see me once in six months and asks me if she can lend me some money. Isn't it hard? And it all came suddenly—overnight.”

Frances tried to murmur a consolatory phrase, but Mrs. Walker shook her head.

“You're young, Mrs. Ware, and there are things

ahead of you. For me everything is finished—just finished and over.”

Frances thought of her mother, and touched the woman’s hand.

“You don’t know; some unexpected hope may come . . .”

Mrs. Walker shook her head dolefully.

“No, no, it’s too late. But come and eat your dinner.”

Frances was about to go, when Julian came in. He nodded a curt dismissal to Mrs. Walker.

“My dear,” he said, “you shouldn’t hold intimate conferences with such a woman. There’s an unclassifiable moral shabbiness about her.”

“I did not seek her. But even had I done so—what then? You are not very careful to prevent my being lonely!”

He threw himself into a chair and sighed.

“I suppose you are right; I suppose so.”

He looked at her.

“Will you go out with me this evening—now?”

“If you really wish it.”

“Of course I do, and it will be a change for you. I—I have affairs—of various kinds that keep me late. It’s a pity you have no friends.”

"What friends can a woman in my position have?"

"I thought we had silently agreed to leave that subject alone!"

"Perhaps, Julian. The question is: will it leave us alone?"

He got up and walked the room from end to end.

"My dear, I'm tired and nervous. Let us go out together, but let us have no discussion. For God's sake," he burst out in sudden wrath, "no discussion!"

She looked at him with a sad astonishment. Perhaps she ought not to go; but the thought of the long evening in that dingy room oppressed her. She put on her hat and gloves and they started out.

They took the subway down-town, for Julian seemed to avoid the places which they had visited of old in the first fervour of their golden passion, and Frances gladly permitted herself to be directed. . . . It was a relief from thought and care. At Seventy-second Street they left the train and emerged, in a moment, into the large, clear space at the crossing of Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. Here all objects stood out with a clarity as definite as in daylight, but the silvery pallour of the electric illumination gave them an air of frailness

and artificiality. The domes of palaces, the spires of churches, lay pale and flat against the dusky sky, as the pinnacles of a painted city in the white calcium light of the stage. In the strange brightness of this scene, amid its soft, swift movement, there came to Frances, remembering her irremediable sorrows, a haunting sense of the fragile convention by which, from the nocturnal city, its revelers strive to exile a consciousness of sickness and sorrow, of the gaunt face of life and the ineluctable shadow of death. Upon the faces of the men and women whom they passed she seemed to discern a strange and heartless smile—a smile that symbolised the spirit of the scene and of the hour, so avid of nerves trembling like the strings of a tortured violin, so conscious of its rejection of care and its surrender to the lure of brief joy and transitory loveliness. These people, modern, practical, alert, had entered for a space their land of faery—a land beyond the confines of good and evil, beyond the shores of greed and toil, isolated from the common earth and lit by silver suns. And Frances, unable to throw off the thought of her cares, was angered at this fleeting mockery and its participants. What right had men to make merry while there was in the world such unhappiness as hers? even such woe as

that of the drab woman in the up-town boarding-house, whose husband death had stolen from her, and whose children life?

Walking away from the square into the darker streets seemed to Frances very much like better times, so near, and yet, in a disastrous sense, so distant. The shadows of the tall houses and of the Elevated structure on Columbus Avenue quieted her nerves. She yearned to say to Julian: "Why cannot we lay aside this corroding discontent, these strange woes, and be happy, simply and quietly, in the common way, as all men are? I will love you, work for you. Only give me peace!" But she knew that his mood forbade such words, that they would not soothe, but only irritate him; that inner defeat had made him stubborn and unyielding. They walked, with apparent aimlessness, up-town, and passed the Museum of Natural History. Then, suddenly, Julian turned to her.

"Are you hungry?"

"A little."

"I forgot that you had no dinner at the house. I'm not hungry, only thirsty."

He took her to a little, white restaurant, full of mirrors, on Columbus Avenue, and they sat down at a small marble-topped table. He ordered for

her a slight refection and for himself a bottle of Burgundy, of which he drank glass after glass in rapid succession. His face became flushed and his eyes softened. One of his rare hours of communication came to him.

"Frances, did I speak harshly to you a while ago?" He did not wait for an answer. "It is merely an effect of jangled nerves. I did not know what that meant—once. But, you see—you must see—the maddening intellectual confusion that has come upon me! To choose the path that seems to one so inevitably right; to seek to escape thereby all the hemming, harrowing, degrading pettiness of life; in a word, to choose love and work instead of vile domesticities and middle-class preoccupations—and then—to fail, to suffer shipwreck, to go under, in a sense—!"

He drank more wine, thirstily, savagely.

"And now?" he asked.

Frances gathered herself together.

"Conform!" she said.

"Never—and it is you who have made conformity through marriage impossible. Had you entered upon our union without any subtle reservations, had you given it a fair trial, and had we then failed—perhaps! But you sowed the seed of ruin from the

first, and you cannot now reap the fruit of your desire."

"Then you have come to—hate me?"

He clenched his fists.

"There, again, is an utter confusion of thought. It is not a question of love or hate, but of the method of one's life."

"And do you think that any—good woman would have entered that union without reservation?"

"I did think so."

"You are wrong, Julian; utterly wrong. No woman who had entered it freely would have been worth having."

"Why?"

"I can't tell you. I can't give you reasons that would appeal to your mind. But I know it."

He sneered.

"Our mental processes are strangely different."

She almost feared him at this moment—feared in him the merciless intellect that would square the living world with its own conclusions, however hearts ached or nerves trembled, or body and soul found only death in life.

"There is one other solution," she said. "I can go home."

He laid his hand on hers in the old, dear way.

"I want you, Frances."

"But on your own terms?"

"Yes; I can't help it. That's the way I'm made."

"And you would let me break myself to pieces against that condition?"

He looked at her with a strange blending of tenderness and hardness.

"I suppose so."

This was the first time in many weeks that they had probed the depths of their lives, and no word of clearness had been spoken. As they walked back slowly and the lines of yellow gas-lamps rolled away before them like a weird luminous ribbon, Frances felt more than ever as though she lived in a turbid dream. Julian pressed her arm from time to time, but in his very tenderness she seemed to feel an element of the unrelenting. Yet he had been kind in that he had never, by word or look, referred to the strange moral confusion of her episode with Held. His heart, then, was hers; only the stubborn mind, fortified by memory in its workings, was unbending.

They found the house, upon their return, in confusion. The street-door was open, and heavy footsteps sounded on the stairs. Julian went ahead to

see what had caused the disturbance. He came back in a moment.

"It seems that Mrs. Walker has taken an overdose of morphine. She's unconscious and they've sent for a doctor."

"Is any one with her?"

"Miss Godkin."

Frances remembered the tall, pale, ill-looking woman who had come to the house recently, but who rarely appeared at meals.

"Don't you think," she asked, "that it would be kind for me to go?"

"Kind? No! What can you do for her?" But Frances was on her way.

She found the woman stretched on a bed—yellow, ghastly, tragically hideous. The flare of a single jet of gas seemed to give the bare room an unnatural light. Miss Godkin stood at the head of the bed, clasping, with thin fingers, a heavy cross of plain gold which hung from her neck. Frances spoke softly.

"Is there anything I can do?"

Miss Godkin shook her head.

"It's not very bad this time. . . ."

"This time?"

"Yes. Did you not know that Mrs. Walker unfortunately takes morphine?" The pale eyes rested oddly on Frances. "I've known her long . . . come to her, left her, taken up the burden once more; but there's little hope. She started long ago; but since her husband left her—"

"Left her? But she told me he was dead!"

"Yes, yes. She tries to comfort herself so . . . by a make-believe. The consciousness of her guilt rests heavily upon her." Again the thin hands sought the golden cross. "She refuses to accept a truer consolation."

"And her children left her for the same reason?"

"Yes."

"It seems hard."

"The wages of sin. . . . It was a miserable business. The man left her . . . she hates him now . . . and yearns for her husband and her children. . . . Here's the doctor, Mrs. Ware."

Frances felt herself dismissed. She went quickly to bed, but not to sleep. She could not put out of her heart and brain the scene she had just left—the pale, yellowish room; the corpse-like figure on the bed, and that other cold face bending above. She thought of the wretched story, the wretched con-

solation, the utter, bleak hopelessness that must inhabit that weary, wayward soul. Here, as everywhere and always, the free following of the heart's desire, the defiance of law and custom and the ancient compacts of man, had brought ruin. Was it a brutal accident, a violation of the serene order of the universe? Had this woman come to an end so bitter merely because men must impose their will upon all who defy them? It seemed incomprehensible that the breaking of an external law, a law made and imposed by man, however useful, should necessarily entail a penalty so awful! Why had this woman's children no charity for her? why did they follow the cold way of the world and leave her, who had borne them, desolate . . . ? In the watches of the night Frances saw before her the shape of a great terror. Were not she and Julian, even now, at the beginning of their punishment, because they, too, had broken the law? Were they not reaping discord, pain, confusion? Why must it be so? why? She looked upon the sleeping form of him who was not her husband and seemed to see upon his face the shadow of troubling dreams and fateful premonitions. But they might yet save themselves—there was yet time to flee from the wrath to come

—and Frances determined that she would put pride away from her, for his sake and hers, and for the sake of the new life beating under her heart, and plead with him on the morrow for their common salvation.

XVIII

BUT she could not carry out her plan. For soon after the dawn a prodigious ringing was heard at the house-door, and a telegram was brought up. It was from Dr. Garnett, and informed Frances that her mother was dangerously ill. She felt herself grow pale and tremble. She realised swiftly that, in the natural order of things, such an event was only to be expected, her mother's body being weak and overworn. But Frances had never permitted herself—such was her vital repulsion to the idea of decay or death—to dwell upon the last, grave end of our nature. She sat up in bed, dazed and forlorn. She could not cry or utter her grief; but, drawing up her knees, she rested her head on them in mute misery. The silence was broken by Julian's voice.

“Aren't you going?”

She looked up.

“Yes . . . now!”

She sprang from the bed and began to dress rapidly. She heard Julian speak as from afar.

"I suppose you will sleep there, too. That will be best. I shall drop in every day to see you and to find out how your mother is. Don't you think that will be the best plan?"

She turned around to him slowly.

"You are glad, Julian?"

His voice showed irritation.

"Glad?"

"Of this chance to—get rid of me. You have no compassion . . . no love . . ."

Sobs shook her whole frame. •

"My mother may be dying at this moment, and it is I who have helped to kill her—I—and you! And your only thought is that you—"

"Will be freed for a while from hourly perplexity and torture? Yes. That fact doesn't make me any less sorry for Mrs. Garnett's illness. But it is not my fault that I feel so. It is yours."

It seemed to her that, at this moment, she could bear no more, and with the thought a great calm came upon her. She washed her eyes and continued to dress. When she was ready to go she turned to Julian.

"Goodbye."

"Goodbye."

He wanted to kiss her, but she drew back and

passed swiftly out of the room and out of the house into the grey, dawn-lit street. Here there was silence; here she was, for a space, alone with her own soul. She looked up at the faintly coloured sky, at the grey houses; and from this subdued quietude she gathered strength to go bravely into the face of danger and sorrow and, perhaps, reproach.

But when she turned into the well-known street where so large and momentous a portion of her girlhood had been passed, and when she thought of the circumstances of her return, she could have wept aloud. She hung back, in sudden fear, hardly daring to walk the few remaining steps. A force, almost physical in its violence, seemed to hold her back. It was surely the bitterest path her feet had ever trod. . . . She entered the familiar door and climbed the stairs, still covered by the old, shabby carpets. At every landing she stopped to rest, and heard, in the stillness of the house, the beating of her heart. When she came to the door of the flat she rang the bell. And this simple action caused her so violent an effort that it was as if the very roots of her being were rent. She stood very still and heard slow footsteps approach in the hallway. Then the door opened and her father stood

before her—grey, bent, and old. She stood there, trembling and ashamed—a child once more. He stretched out his arms.

“Daughter!”

“Father!”

Then he took her face between his hands, looking upon her long and earnestly.

“Your, too, have suffered.”

Speechless, she nodded.

“Yes, yes—,” he went on, and his eyes seemed to look far away—“you, too, have suffered, and suffering wipes out much . . . perhaps . . . everything. . . .”

He had drawn her into the little hall, holding her close to him.

“And mother?” she asked.

He seemed, for a minute, to have almost forgotten.

“She is sick, child; sick unto death. She will be at peace soon. Be very gentle with her.”

She could not understand this strange detachment, or the dreamy quietness of his manner; but she was soothed and comforted. He led her in where her mother sat in an invalid-chair, looking small and old. Her body seemed to have shrunk to half its natural size; her skin was discoloured by

yellow blotches; her eyes apparently vacant. Frances knelt before her and took her hand. Mrs. Garnett's head twitched.

"Is it you, Fanny?" she whispered. "I was just dozing. Father said he would send for you."

"Yes, of course, and . . . mamma . . . aren't you a little glad to see me?"

"Glad to see you?" Her voice had in it a shadow of its old querulousness. "Yes; I told father to send for you weeks ago—weeks ago. . . ."

Frances looked up.

"Why did you not send for me, father?"

He looked steadily into her eyes.

"I had hoped that you would come—freely—of your own impulse; but I now see that it was not hardness of heart that kept you from us, but unhappiness. Am I right?"

She arose and went to him.

"You do understand, father."

"And does it comfort you, my dear?"

"Oh, so much . . . more . . . more than I can ever tell you!"

"Then . . . some day . . . we will talk."

She nodded as he turned to go from the room. At the door he stopped and looked upon her once again. That look, too, she understood. It was a

summons to do her duty, her whole, last duty, without swerving or complaint.

It was no light or easy task that she had undertaken. She was not strong with the repressed energy of old, and the long days and nights of watching wore upon her. Even when wakefulness was not necessary she found sleep difficult. In the sick-room a single light burned dimly, and in her troubled drowsiness the events of the past months stalked before Frances in phantasmal procession. The walks in New York; the sunshine of Queenshaven, now glaring, in her imagination, beyond endurance; Held's face, large, distorted, and white as leprosy; and, finally, these later days of dim, uncertain sorrow—all shaped themselves before her, between the narrow walls of the little room wherein her mother lay or sat breathing heavily and struggling weakly against mortal ill. She would start violently from such dreams and be a little glad of the old, familiar things about her; would even touch them to reassure herself that she was here—here with sorrow and sickness; but safe, at last, from the hourly combat. Thus, gradually, a feeling of relief came upon her, and, amid work and watching, restfulness. She did not know until now how very tired she had been; and, like a bird trav-

elling over silver leagues of unbroken ice, she was grateful for a single branch that the pitiless Winter had left. Her only fear now was—a fear that broke with sudden force upon her brief intervals of rest—that the peace and quietude would end, and that she would be driven forth once more from these dim rooms into the glare of the world and the harrying of its problems.

Julian kept his promise. During the early afternoon hours he would come and insist that she take a few turns with him in the street, asserting that she needed air. But Frances, not without a pang for him, knew that he could not, in spite of his convictions and his courage, look into her father's thin, grey face without a feeling of shame. Julian met the imputation, which she half-silently made, resolutely.

"You are quite right. One can't shake off all one's inherited instincts in a single lifetime or a portion of one. I feel that I have wronged your father; I know that I have not. I didn't—in the old, sentimental, romantic phrase—take you. You came to me—one equal to the other."

"Are you trying to persuade yourself?" she asked suddenly.

His eyes darkened.

"Hardly. That's not a habit of mine."

She could not fully trust the suspicion that had come to her. Were his elaborate intellectual defences weakening? Had something of her own emotional attitude come to him? She could not dwell upon the matter in her thoughts, for a greater preoccupation was upon her, and she felt daily as if even this half-hour with Julian was stolen from the sacred trust. And, as the slow weeks dragged, and she became more and more immersed in her homely cares, as she readjusted herself, so peacefully and gladly now, to the conditions of her old life, he seemed to become strange to her and detached. She ceased, almost unconsciously, to inquire into his doings, and even the rare days on which he did not come hardly stirred her to a new sense of their relations and their love.

Mrs. Garnett did not become worse as rapidly as her husband had feared. But, under the pressure of disease and age, her faculties seemed slowly to drift from her. And yet this spectacle, painful as it was, seemed not so tragic to Frances as the thoughts that came to her mother in intervals of mental life. Here, in the shadow of Eternity, if the falling veil lifted for an hour, the old woman would complain that she could no longer rule the

material affairs of the little household; she would insist upon seeing the simple provisions that had been purchased, and criticise them with something of her old energy. Frances felt herself powerless to avert the attitude in her mother and the words that stung her to the quick. Who was she to seek to lead anyone in the way of the spirit? Had she the right even to feel, and, in spite of herself, to condemn? Through the silent method of communication that had grown up between herself and her father of late, she told him of her pain. He followed her out of the room and stood beside her in the little kitchen.

"Do you not—pity the blind?"

Her old impatience flashed out.

"Were you always so long-suffering and charitable?"

He shook his head.

"It takes years and sorrows—many sorrows. It takes, above all, a good dose of failure—even if the failure is only worldly. It takes, in a high sense, the surrender of hope."

"That's incomprehensible to me."

"At your age—it must be, whatever you have suffered. You still see, from every valley, the far blue hills. You will probably find—though I hope

not—that the vision and the bleeding feet and the consolation of a brave journey are all we ever possess. The hills themselves come no nearer. As we go on, our hopes fail and our dreams wither, and those who are dear to us disappoint or forsake us; but we forgive them, knowing that we, too, have not only forsaken others, but so often—what is much worse—our own best selves. And so we learn to be charitable with a boundless charity, and patient as the earth and the stars themselves.”

“And what does it all lead to?”

“The desire to know that is the most difficult desire to lay aside. But that, too, must be done.”

“We can bear a thing without knowledge—yes. But, father, we must act!”

“You are thinking of yourself?”

“Yes.”

The old man’s blue eyes assumed the far-away look that she had seen in them of late.

“Don’t let us speak of that yet—not yet. Unless you must take some decisive action at once?”

“No. But why wait? I’ve had no one to whom to carry my troubles.”

“You have now, dear daughter; and yet, I counsel you to wait a little while, to wait until you are quieter, still quieter.”

She sank, in truth, into a half-dreamy peace. Mrs. Garnett seemed, despite her weakness, to cling to life so tenaciously that the sting of an immediate anxiety disappeared and day followed quiet day in healing monotony. Frances found that the same circle of insignificant tasks gently absorbed her thoughts, so strong and poignant of late, and she likened herself to one who had fled from the turbulence of life into some cloistral isolation where the soul is sustained by an unvaried chain of peaceful observances. In the evening, the day's work over, she would sit with her father near the familiar lamp, reading or letting her thoughts wander across the book, into the distance of dreams. The fevered visions of her flight, her passionate experiences, her final shame—these gradually softened and then fled, and in their place came a sense of the unreality of all that had passed. It withdrew itself from her—protected so securely in the grey quietude of home—until, at times, a pang came that a dim forgetfulness could so soon creep over love and suffering and regret.

Her talks with Julian—rarer and briefer now—became constrained and almost conventional. December snow-storms and biting cold made walking almost impossible, and he still hesitated to enter the

house. She asked him of his work, and he told her that he had done little, that his days seemed to pass in languid wandering and futile attempts; but energy and even the desire for work seemed to have left him. He spoke of these things like one groping in darkness.

"My whole life is disorganised, broken—something has snapped. I can't settle down to any matter of impersonal interest. I've simply lost, intellectually, the Will to Live. I'm getting to the point of self-contempt."

She was in a clearer mood.

"And you resent it to me?"

He looked at her calmly.

"Yes. I suppose it's bitterly unjust. But, I was just beginning to see my way in my work; and then comes—the sexual interest, embodied in you, and there follows disintegration, ruin—death. The injustice is not individual, though; woman is the enemy of man's work."

"Isn't that one reason—if it's true at all—why society has established certain rules?"

"Within these rules the destruction is most fatal."

Tears came into her eyes—tears of despair and of defeat. He seemed unbending, unpersuadable.

Death would find him unchanged. Then her grief turned to anger.

"If you think that I have ruined your life, robbed you of the power to work—go! go!"

He smiled.

"You've learned very little, after all. You say 'go' and imagine the word to have any meaning. Take out of my heart the memory of you, rob my senses of the yearning for you! Then tell me to go. Until then—it is a mockery."

She clasped her hands.

"I can go, Julian!"

"I doubt it! You're in the same boat. Nature doesn't do her work half-way with—picked material—like ourselves. We're inextricably bound up in each other. Our very nerves have suffered a change, passed into each other. . . . There are no words for the process. We're in for it—in some form—for life!"

His face softened a little; then he went on:

"Go upstairs, dear, dear, and I'll stay away for a few days and try once more to recover my equilibrium. Then—we'll see."

He took her right glove off and kissed her hand with cool lips. Then he went. But she walked on for a little toward Morningside Park. Frost and

rain had covered the trees and bushes, which crackled under their glittering, silver dress. There was a faery gleaming, a faery silence in the park—the icy calm and restfulness of Winter. Frances stood and gazed, lost in thought, upon the strange loneliness of the scene. Then her eyes sought the heights, on which the sky, filled with the last faint glow of sunset, seemed to lean. The colour faded, and a few large stars swung into view over the motionless tops of the bare poplars. She stood still, in wordless, breathless adoration. Her mother was sick unto death; he who should have been her husband was bent upon strange wanderings from the appointed path; her life lay under the shadows of night—but the great stars consoled her, giving, as is their wont, hope to her who was hopeless, and joy to her who was in the sore travail of sorrow.

XIX

CHRISTMAS EVE came with a whirl of snow. Frances had hardly remembered the coming of it, and wondered how so light a thing as her forgetfulness could pierce so deep. In other years she and her mother and father had been wont, for this short season, to put away all care. There had crept into the little dwelling a feeling of unity and love, and happiness of a homely, child-like kind. She looked at the snow-flakes falling steadily on the street, and thought of the Christmas feelings of her childhood, of Andersen's Winter story which she connected with them, and of the two Northland children who sang of the coming of the Christ-child. How everything had changed! How life had taken and estranged her from her old self! Sitting here in the twilight at the window-pane, watching the snow-flakes that now fell softlier, Frances brooded deeply and almost fearfully upon the strangeness of all things. . . . Dr. Garnett came in slowly from the next room and sat down close to her. His mood seemed to be in harmony with hers.

"Do you want your playthings, little girl?"

She smiled and nodded.

"Do you remember how the fir-tree used to smell?" she asked.

"Yes, yes, child."

"The trimmings must be somewhere still," she said, "the gilt chains, and the glass balls and the candle-holders."

"You think those were happy days—now?"

"How happy!"

The tears came in spite of herself, but she still looked at her father.

"We must all put away our playthings, one by one," he said. "The trimmings of the Christmas tree are not the hardest to give up."

They were both startled by the ringing of the outer bell. Frances went to the door and returned, pale and dry-eyed, carrying a bunch of lustrous crimson roses and a small box. She laid the roses on the table, opened the box and displayed a jewelled bracelet. She placed it next to the flowers and then stood still, hesitating. She touched the roses and carried one, that had fallen, to her face. Its fragrance smote upon her senses and brought a wave of passionate yearning and regret. The deep emotion gave her strength to turn and speak.

"Julian has sent these," she said softly.

"I see that." Her father's voice was stern.

She turned in an attitude of defence.

"He is—"

"Not your husband—" Dr. Garnett cut her short. "And not that alone. He has now even lost the right to be your friend."

She felt the blood surge into her head with the passionate impulse to defend Julian. And thus her living love of him stood clear. But she restrained herself.

"Why has he lost all right?"

"Because he has wronged you; because he might have shielded you—even from yourself."

"Why do you blame him alone? You were not so severe—at first."

"I see that you love him, my dear. You must do—what you must. I had hoped—"

"That I would not return to him?"

"Yes. I can see no peace for you—there."

She leaned with her two hands on the table and bent her head forward.

"You are right, papa, and I want—peace. I am not going back to-day or to-morrow, and I shall try to—to alter the conditions. But, finally . . ."

Dr. Garnett looked searchingly at her.

"Frances, I have had, at times, a suspicion; it has haunted me."

She did not avoid his eyes.

"You are right," she said slowly. "I shall be a mother. But you do not know me if you think I will return for that reason. I will not be forced. If my free will does not take me, nothing shall."

"That is sheer perversity. You have not made the world; you will not change it. You must rely upon the experience of mankind, and that experience dictates as your first duty to give your child a father. I am sorry that I urged you not to go."

"Perhaps you are right. I have had glimmerings of such a truth; that we must rest upon wider decisions than our own. But I know that the fact of my motherhood alone would not compel me. It may be wrong—but . . ."

"We are what we are. But we must try, try to do the Will of God."

"How shall we know it?"

Dr. Garnett's eyes again became dreamy and serene.

"The knowledge is always given us. Only, sometimes, we do not recognise it and so—pass it by."

Frances turned pale, for, without warning, a heavy fall sounded near the room. The sound was

dull, strange, fatal, and she felt certain that it was her mother. She followed her father into the hall. There they found Mrs. Garnett, who had evidently tried to come to them, lying upon her face. In some occult way, from the very fold of the dressing-gown that covered her mother, Frances divined that that which lay upon the floor was no longer a being but a thing, and the tragic horror of it gripped her heart.

They carried Mrs. Garnett to her room and summoned other physicians, but with a recognition of the futility of such action. It was done hopelessly and mechanically. Despite her terror and grief, there came to Frances the vision (more clearly remembered later) of the calm upon her father's face through all the sad offices of the occasion and the hour. She herself was strangely stricken and overwhelmed with a grief that had in it an element of the impersonal. Never before had she seen death, and though, like all men, she could speak of it glibly enough, the staggering fact—the fact that, first seen, throws us into an incommunicable despair—was new to her. This body that had borne her, that, in her childhood, had been to her the essence of life, with which her tortured mind refused to connect the thought of matter that can, like tree

or flower, know a complete dissolution—this body was no longer her mother, but a thing dumb and weirdly estranged. In the night-watches, terror shook her over the intolerable fate of man. She felt a wild rebellion, an impulse to let all control of self go, to hurl herself blindly against the walls of the room in which her mother lay in silence. The loss of identity, seen at the moment of death so sharply—that seemed the one supreme and immedicable woe, the terror before which men, futile phantoms in the shadow of its certainty, should reel with hoarse desperation under the lurid mockery of the sun.

Dr. Garnett shared her watch, speaking to her comforting words. But in the room floated a grievous odour of carbolic acid that seemed to wring all her senses so that she scarcely heard his gentle voice. At last dawn crept up stealthily and stretched thin, pallid fingers through the screened windows. Dr. Garnett arose.

"Let us go, my daughter, and rest a little. There is nothing to be done here."

She looked slowly about her.

"No; I suppose not."

They stepped out into the hallway and he put his arm on her shoulder.

"Get some coffee, my dear, and a roll—something for both of us; we need it."

She looked at him, wondering, and went on.

"Yes; do just that, however heartless it may seem. Nothing can serve us in the face of death but life—and the simplest things are the best."

Frances went into the kitchen that looked strangely white in the sullen dawn. She could scarcely force herself to use the dishes and utensils that now her mother would never touch again. Here—the thought overwhelmed her—had centred the life of the woman who had given her life. Here had been passed those tragically futile years—not by any compulsion (the necessary work could have been done with light touch and swift forgetfulness), but through some warped energy of self-torture and self-humiliation. Mrs. Garnett had never transformed the wearier duties of her life into contributions to some fairer end, but had wilfully submitted her soul to their sway. The shadows of the long, ignoble years made her death more piteous to Frances. Why had God not given her some loftier strain by which to conquer for her life some element of dignity and loveliness? Why had He made both of her life and death a thing of such intolerable pathos? Futile, futile—the word beat like a pulse

in Frances' head. And yet not wholly so, for the dead woman had been a mother and had not lost the love of her child. The thought consoled Frances deeply; she leaned her head against the kitchen-table and wept with a sense of relief. Then she completed her simple preparations and brought in the food and drink.

Dr. Garnett looked troubled.

"I must go out, Frances. There is much to be attended to and I can't leave you alone."

Frances could not face the thought of being left alone here and now. Then, with a flash that, for a second, rendered the whole world luminous to her, she remembered that there was one who loved her. She looked straight at her father.

"Send Julian here!"

The old man bowed his head.

"I am glad to see you feel that you can turn to him."

He arose and soon went from the flat, and Frances heard his receding footsteps upon the stairs. She summoned all her vital forces to conquer the dread that threatened to overwhelm her. Dim ancestral terrors crept into her soul, weird racial memories; she saw white shadows behind her, felt ghostly hands upon her, and trembled at the casual

waving of a curtain in the morning wind. She lifted a shade and looked out on the street. It was white with snow and silent under an iron-grey sky. This was Christmas Day, but to her a day of desolation. The clock upon the mantel beat out the endless minutes like a pulse—with a fateful throb. All things seemed inhuman to her and relentless; mercy had perished out of the universe—mercy and life; and there were left decay and cruelty and dumb despair. . . .

The door-bell shrilled in mockery of the silence of death. Frances ran along the hallway, with fear at her heels, and once more, after the lapse of many weeks, felt Julian's strong arms fold about her.

"My poor child, you are all alone?"

"Yes; it was awful."

He nodded.

"I understand. We're in the grip of things with which we have no concern. You feel a peculiar tragedy in the fact that it's Christmas Day. Of course, *that* is irrelevant. . . ."

She led him in, and they sat down side by side on a sofa. He seemed pale, and she noticed suddenly that his hair had grown grey at the temples. The sight gave her a feeling of infinite sadness, of the piteousness of all things.

"We've both had a hard time, Julian."

He pressed her hand.

"Yes."

"And it all comes to that," she continued, and pointed to the room in which her mother lay.

His sombre eyes turned to her.

"Ah, dear, that's not the worst. That means—rest."

"And loss of everything—everything?"

"I'm afraid so. Our knowledge of the universe leaves no hope for the survival of a conscious self. But I think we have moments when we acquiesce gladly in this fact."

She pressed her hands to her head.

"No, Julian, no. We can't, we mustn't; it turns all life to death. Think of my mother, my poor mother! She was kind and good, but—you know, you understand—so warped and stunted by life. And if this is the end, if she's to have no other chance. . . . Julian, it's that thought that gives me no peace."

He spoke softly.

"You think it matters whether there's another chance because it matters to you. What does the soulless universe, what do the infinite constellations care whether one poor human woman had the right

chance or not? Life evolves—life disintegrates. In the beginning there was silence . . . in the end there will be silence. Dear, we must use the little life we have as best we can. It's all we have."

She leaned her head on his shoulder.

"Frances," he said, "your duty here is nearly done. When are you coming to me?"

The question frightened her.

"I'm tired, Julian, and wretched. Don't ask me . . . wait!"

His grip on her hand tightened and he whispered:

"Are you coming? Are you coming?"

She knew from of old his fault of sudden anger, and sat up.

"Julian, be pitiful . . . my mother . . ."

And, as of old, he looked remorseful.

"Forgive me, dear. But you are life, life—my life!"

She shrank, at this hour, from the resonant passion in his voice.

"We must wait, Julian."

She arose and stood before him. He regarded her—nunlike in her black dress and with her pallid face—and, bending down, kissed her hands.

"I can wait. . . . Is anything to be done?"

"No."

Thereafter they sat for an hour in silence until men came to perform the last, sad offices for the dead. With them came Dr. Garnett. He kissed Frances and then turned to Julian.

"I thank you for coming. There is nothing more that you can do."

Julian arose, bearing himself with quiet dignity under the older man's implied rebuke.

"I wish to come to-morrow."

"If you will."

Julian turned to Frances and kissed her on the forehead.

"Remember what I told you. . . ."

Flowers came from Dr. Garnett's colleagues, from a few acquaintances, and flowers that Julian had caused to be sent: roses and violets and lilies-of-the-valley. The heavy fragrance of the flowers in the little flat sank upon Frances' senses and numbed her. Grief, remembrance, passion, regret, despair—all were drowned and whelmed in the strange, poignant odour of the flowers. She passed, tearless and calm, from room to room, scarcely realising the stern, irrevocable rite that the morrow would bring forth.

XX

No more snow fell during the night, but the grey of the heavens had deepened and the city lay in dimness. It was bitterly cold, and Frances shivered forlornly into her clothes. She wondered at what seemed to her, this morning, the bitter cold in her own heart. All the well-springs of emotion were dry. She looked listlessly out into a dead, grey world. Very vaguely her spirit detached itself from the agony of the time, and here—in her little room—held counsel with itself over the things that had come into her life. Memory, which, at the few halting-places of her troubled existence, asserted its sway so strongly in her, absorbed the throbbing sorrow that should have been hers, into a larger mood—a mood less piercing, no less sorrowful, but with a nobler sorrow. She thought of the blither years of her girlhood, the aching dreams of her young maturity, of the coming of love, of many days and hours that stood out from the wreck of the half-forgotten past. Each of these days or

hours had clothed this little room with its own atmosphere; and now the four narrow walls and the simple objects that hid their bareness had the power to resuscitate, through subtlest associations, the very spiritual note that belonged to each pregnant period in the obliterated years. All that was over now. One thought, one memory, the sense of one fragile human action lost forever, would hide all others in the immensity of its shadow. Her mother would never come again, at the day's end, to smooth the hair from her forehead and commit her to the blessedness of sleep. The motherless child arose in Frances and tasted all the bitterness of the one loss that marks a pitiless period in our lives. Yet she remained calm, with the grey, dreary calm of the sky and the trodden snow upon which she looked.

She prepared breakfast for her father and herself and took her accustomed place at the table. She found herself noting all things with wonderful distinctness; the interior before her became an etching of firm and definite lines. Her father's face was white and delicately touched by age. His wrinkles seemed the slow accretions (they were more deeply marked than usual this morning) of sorrow and its wisdom, ruling many quiet hours devoid of

vain and passionate strife, and preserving even in its depths something of a fine measure and sobriety. The clear, old, blue eyes looked into hers.

"You must be brave to-day, dear. It's the hardest day."

She understood him fully.

"We have not learned," he went on, "to lay away our dead simply and reverently. We make a black show of it—a strident horror of what should be the most peaceful thing in the world."

She felt her calm disintegrate under his grave words.

"I can bear it all, I think, papa—all—but not speech!"

He kissed her forehead and turned to leave the room.

"Be ready at ten."

During the hour that followed she mastered herself with difficulty. A sick oppression settled upon her chest, a weight of unshed tears and unlamented sorrows. It seemed to her suddenly that to-day life was asking too much; that there should be for her some door of merciful escape; that she should be able to flee far into the open, away from the dread trappings of these obsequies, and be alone—calmly and nobly alone—with her grief. But men

and women, she knew, would stamp such an attempt to escape as the last irreverence, the crowning turpitude of a callous heart. The world demands not only a show of grief, but a show rigidly adapted to its coarse perceptions; and Frances, bearing always in her mind the failure of the central action in her life, was in no mood to defy the edicts of society. Slowly, painfully, summoning all her strength, she started, with a calm exterior, to accompany her mother upon the last journey. . . .

She sat in the carriage beside her father, bearing as best she could the wearily slow pace of the procession. Seeing the tension upon her pale face, he pulled up the curtain next to her and advised her to look out. Spite of the sad, grey weather, men were busy upon the streets and walked nimbly enough, preoccupied with their affairs. They hardly glanced at the hearse and the carriages, which should have reminded them, Frances thought, as by a hoarse and grieving bugle-call, of their own last end. But they went about their business with a brave unconcern, a forgetfulness of their doom that might have seemed to her in other moods splendid, but now looked only coarse and brutish. In quieter thoroughfares the oppression of her heart grew lighter, and lighter yet when they came to

bare places, grim enough under the wintry sky, but empty of the indecent, the blasphemous activities of man.

As she entered the gate of the cemetery, she experienced a last struggle to weep, to cry out, to escape afar. But this, too, she mastered, and stood presently beside the newly dug grave. The clergyman read with simplicity the immemorial words of hope, and, as he read, softly, beautifully, flake by delicate flake, the snow began to fall. It fell white upon his black robe, upon her own black dress, upon the pitiless earth and the open grave. Then it fell faster and thicker. The ancient kindness of Nature folded her weary children, in their bitter hour, in a cloak of white austerity, of cold and healing peace. The coffin was lowered into the grave—"earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." But Frances carried in her heart another message: "It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power." Somehow, she felt, the ancient sanctity of these words was not of the vain babbling of man. If the oblivion of that cold earth, after the grievous dishonour that life inflicts on us, were all, man would agonise in the madness of an intolerable despair. But the universe does not madden us, does not con-

fuse us. Form after form is obliterated; the ancient truths which are the conditions of life stand fast. The grave was filled, and the snow fell upon it and it grew to be a mound of white. Flowers were laid upon the mound, but upon these, too, the snow fell and the crimson roses became argent. But Frances laid her head against her father's shoulder and wept. . . .

Throughout all, stopping short only at the ultimate moment, had been her consciousness of Julian's wistful eyes. They were not, as was their wont, sombre or serious or impassioned, but fixed upon her with an indefinite appeal. She pitied him with an impersonal pity, for she knew, instinctively, of how deep a struggle that reluctant sweetness must have been the evidence. But an austerer emotion than pity or love held her. One of the single, fundamental feelings of man—common as the breathed air and as unobtrusive—had arisen to rescue her. The cumulative banality of the mouthing ages, of creed and script, of church and conventicle, had no part in it. In the presence of inexorable fate, she had met the unconquerable hope of the world. Alone, unaided, she had found it—not as a remembered teaching of childhood, not as an oft-heard phrase now suddenly grown luminous.

Driven by her own soul in its hour of need, she had divined truth for herself—truth that brought her a strange serenity. She had not huddled the indifferent clay into the wintry earth: she had surrendered her mother into the hands of God.

The carriage drove back swiftly, but the sound of wheels and horses' hoofs was muffled by the snow that still fell softly. Dr. Garnett spoke little—his face was drawn into lines of pain; and Frances, in her new exaltation, felt that she would minister to him and protect him. In the shadowy room of their home, that spoke so tragically of the one who would never return here, the old man, for the first time, broke down.

"They have laid my youth into the grave. . . ."

"And mine," she answered quietly.

He lifted his head from his hands.

"Yours, child?"

She came to him swiftly.

"It is so hard to say, papa. Everything that matters is so hard to say. But I feel as if, until to-day, I had been wandering . . . blind . . . confused."

His eyes cleared and held hers.

"I thought one could live without faith of some kind . . . some faith deep at the bottom of every-

thing else, that some things are true and some are false—always . . . and some things right and some wrong—always, forever, no matter what your . . . reason tells you. Do you understand?"

"I have tried to show you that way."

"Yes; and when I stood out there . . . to-day . . . in the snow, I knew that if there were nothing more than . . . that, no hope . . . nothing to heal and make up for loss—*her* loss—we'd all go mad—all!"

"I know it."

She came still nearer.

"The other day, by the light of his reason, Julian denied any hope. So by the light of the . . . reason he rules his life and—"

"Fails and must fail! Your own agony is the proof. We must live by the experience of the ages, by the unconquerable needs of the soul. The arguments of to-day are with the arguments of yesterday."

He had arisen and stood with outstretched arm.

"I have been a scientist all my life; I have sloughed off one intellectual skin after another, and I've come back at last to a few fundamentals that are not demonstrably, but undemonstrably and mystically true. For a moment, just now, I forgot


... one is so weak . . . but you have reminded me."

They sat together quietly and long in the dusk. Frances thought of her long and bitter struggles, and knew that her soul had always been incorruptible, that, beneath the call of the senses and the lure of life, it had been vigilant. She hardly thought of the practical problem before her. She knew that strength would be hers even to renounce entirely the love which she still carried, strong and inviolate, in her heart. . . .

Julian came the next afternoon and wandered vaguely about the little drawing-room, that still held the faint odour of funereal flowers. Frances, deep in an arm-chair, watched his uncertain movements. The pride of her womanhood forbade her speaking a word that might heal all. Narrow as the conception seemed, she felt that she could not break through it, especially as she saw clearly his competent head. He needed no help. And so her part was a passive one. He touched one bit of bric-à-brac on the mantel, moved another a little farther back, and tapped the fender with his foot. Then he turned abruptly.

"You need air, light . . ."

"I must stay with father for the present."



"Of course; that is only right. But how long, and what then?"

"How long?" she repeated. "He is old and not strong, so my strength must be his."

"And I?" he broke out, almost petulantly.

The light of her firmer beliefs illuminated the ruthlessness of his desires.

"You have had—your share."

He looked at her in consternation.

"You wrong me, Frances, consciously; God knows you do. We can't separate absolutely the senses and the heart. I have loved you, not purely in a sentimental way—I don't understand that—but with the best love in me."

"*Have* loved?" She could not help emphasising the first word.

He shook his head angrily.

"You quibble over words, hasty and ill-considered. It's a question of life itself for us. Are you coming back to me?" His eyes included significantly her whole figure. "You have the strongest right to my protection and love. Are you coming?"

He arose and they looked at each other across the width of the little room. The air seemed to quiver with the unspoken words that, for both, possessed the field of consciousness. Once, twice, his

lips opened and closed; his hands sought vague nothings on the mantel-shelf. To Frances the room seemed to darken and shake; her dry throat throbbed, her fingers tingled curiously. . . . As from a great distance she heard her own low voice.

"No."

It seemed to her that he grew pale—for an instant. Afterward a sullen look, that she knew well, darkened his eyes. His lids drooped and his whole figure seemed to shrink. Then slowly, with lumbering steps, without a backward glance, he strode from the room. Her limbs seemed to melt under her, but she dragged herself to the window. She saw him go forth from the house and walk slowly westward to Morningside Heights. At the corner of the Avenue he turned, and only the red disc of the setting sun that swung over the heights glared balefully into her face. Gone, gone!—she repeated the word with toneless persistence. She had over-estimated her strength, forgotten the fortifying power of the consciousness that, until now, he had been hers even in his absence. All light faded from her soul: all desire to incarnate truth in action seemed pitiable, absurd, monstrous. Her heart cried out after him. Now that it was too late she would have given life for a touch of his hand. She

turned from the window with the impulse to hide in her room, but on the way she met her father. He took her into his arms.

"Child," he said, "you must not despair. One conquers even the bitterness of death."

She raised herself with a last remnant of desperate energy.

"There is bitterness," she cried, "beyond the bitterness of death!"

Then the world turned black before her eyes.

XXI

A SHARP illness followed. The strains of the past months had culminated in that vision of Julian turning the corner—a vision so prosaic to the external eye, so charged for her with final and fatal meaning. She lay in her bed, weak and dreamy, and watched a little spider running to and fro on the ceiling. Day and night blended with each other; light and darkness dislimned softly; time stood still; the quivering nerves, the struggling heart, the tired brain, were mercifully resting in a long, dim period of moveless calm. Then an awakening came, gradual and delightful—an awakening into a beautiful bodily life that rested contentedly in itself. Food and drink had, to her, a fresh and exquisite savour. She came to be grateful for simple and natural things which, under the pressure of intenser preoccupations, she had never noticed. She sat, propped up by pillows, near the window, and saw children playing in the street. Their gestures seemed to her of an engaging grace, their

voices of a purity of bird-like tone, of which she had never seemed conscious. The natural exercise of the senses became a source of joy. She read a little, but it still tired her. And so her eyes wandered from the book before her to the blue sky and to the changeful, floating clouds. . . .

From time to time she tried to regain a sense of the continuity of her life; to recover, almost with an idle curiosity, an entire realisation of the emotions that had swayed her so imperiously. In vain. Even the fact that she would not now be a mother left her unmoved. As the weeks went by and her body grew stronger, her memory became clear and definite. But the eye of her soul saw herself and others only as figures in a grotesque and violent pantomime. She recovered the gesture of life—not the full impulse that had shaped it. Thus came to her the solemn yet not wholly joyless knowledge of the pervasive mortality of human things—the knowledge that existence is sustained and made endurable only by the death of that within us which once seemed life itself. Not that she had forgotten that grave upon which the snow had fallen, or had ceased to love the man to whom she had given her youth. But grief and love had lost forever the intolerable sharpness, the wild turbulence of the past,

and had assumed a decent sobriety. It seemed to her that she heard the music of life no longer as a crying of impassioned violins or a shrilling of angry flutes, but as an organ melody, strong, solemn, and subdued.

The mirror showed lines in her forehead and about her mouth, and even in her hair were strands of grey. And the smile with which she met these discoveries was, to her mind, the final triumph of that richness of experience and gain in character which she felt to be hers. She recognised clearly enough how narrow her experience had been, but also the boundless wealth of its extraordinary depth and intensity for all the years to come.

As her slow convalescence gave place to a gentle glow of health, she had many talks with her father, who had cared for her tenderly and almost alone during her illness. The talks were peaceful and comforting, but for the fact that he seemed, at times, on the verge of an utterance that he feared. Hence, upon a day when she seemed to herself stronger than was her wont, she urged him to speak. He stroked his beard.

"It was to be feared," he said in an almost professional voice, "that any excitement might cause a relapse."

She smiled.

"We will take that for granted, dear father. You are forgiven for withholding whatever you have withheld. And now—?"

"Some weeks after you were taken ill a letter came for you."

He placed his hand on hers, as if to make her feel the security of his presence and his love. She held it firmly, for a great fear came into her heart—a fear that the old agony would rack her again and the old wounds bleed.

"Give it to me," she said softly.

He gave it to her and left the room.

She sat there with the letter in her lap and laid her pale hand on it. Weeks must have passed since he had written it: what weeks to him? A vision of his strong impatience came to her, of the impassioned energy with which he sought to bend the world to his will. Ignorant of her long illness, he must have interpreted her silence as a final repudiation. He must have suffered; for she knew, and was glad in the knowledge, even though it never bore fruit, that she was rooted in his very soul. The thought gave her strength to break the seal and read the few lines within. His words were reticent and almost halting. He asked her to meet him for

a last time, but drew from his request none of its possibilities of pathos. For his reluctance to make emotional capital of the situation, to turn its inevitable sadness into a direct appeal, she honoured and admired him. No fear of a renewal of the old conflict came to her now. Spring was at the door, peace in her heart, and, deeper than both, the strength to overcome without vain strife and cry.

Her father re-entered the room, and his blue eyes rested anxiously upon her. She felt that he had the right to know.

"Julian wishes to see me again."

"And will you consent?"

She answered by another question.

"What am I to do with my life? And yet," she added slowly, "I have learned how to bear. Another struggle like the first is impossible. I can do only one thing."

"And that is?"

"Wait!"

She lay back in her chair and looked up into the boundless blue of the sky. A mild wind came in through the window and swept lightly over her forehead. Sitting there, she dreamed a dream of patience and resignation, of a possible life near great woods shadowing still waters—a life of un-

impassioned surrender to the influence of eternal things. To renounce, to be content, to wait with impregnable faith for the things that were her own and of which time could not rob her—that seemed now, to her vision, the true ideal. How it was to come about she did not know and was satisfied not to ask. She only knew that she had gained a peace that was independent of temporal and, therefore, transitory things.

Days came and went and a wild, young Spring shook with its winds the trees of Morningside Park. The poplars on the heights bowed toward each other; the new leaves twinkled in the sunlight; the living rocks grew warm. Frances was now permitted to walk here. She inhaled the fresh odour of the earth, the stronger fragrance of the budding leafage; she laid her warm hands upon the cool trunks of trees that stood in shadowy places, and felt in Nature a power of spiritual restoration, a source of strength and endurance and quiet joy. It was no longer an echo of her moods or a refuge from them (in either case a mere accessory of her human passions): it rose above and surrounded her, serene, impersonal, passionless, and taught her something of its own enduring calm. . . .

Only, at times, when she returned home, the calm

would leave her and a human hope stir in her heart. It was a hope which she could not define, not even put into words, so vague, so fitful and so strange. But she felt like one who, wandering long and weary ways, knows that he must, in some golden hour, come upon a bright fortune fallen from the skies. At such moments she almost held her breath when she opened the door of the flat, half-afraid that she would find it flooded with the light of a mysterious splendour. She smiled to herself at the intensity which the hope assumed, at her foolish little delays before the house, and the beating of her heart as she went up the stairs.

But it was, at last, no strange gold that she found: it was the sombre, taciturn figure of Julian, leaning against the mantel of the drawing-room. She stopped at the door.

"You . . .! you . . .!"

Her voice died away as he slowly lifted his eyes to her face.

"You did not answer my letter," he said, "and I waited till even pride failed me. Here I am." He passed his hand over his pale forehead. "Here I am."

She saw his profile outlined against the window. His face was thinner and sharper than of old, more

deeply furrowed, almost to ruggedness, in these few months. She looked again and saw that the grey in his temples had crept higher; that the dear head that had so often rested on her bosom looked weary and forlorn. She stretched out her hands to him.

"I could not read your letter for weeks. I was ill."

"Your father told me that just now. But since . . .?"

She dropped his hands.

"What was the use? I did not feel strong enough for another struggle!"

He raised his head and his resolute eyes sought hers.

"There would have been no—struggle!"

Joy fought in her with an unreasonable compassion for him, compassion for that strength which found it so difficult to confess itself weakness.

"You have suffered through me," he went on, "but if you can forget!"

She waved that phase of it aside.

"If I could not forget I never loved you."

He turned from her to hide the emotion which shook him.

"It's close here," he said abruptly, "stifling. If

you will come with me for a little while. There are things—things that must be said. . . . Can't we go to the old place?"

A new strength filled her and she consented. They walked over to the river, and it was to her an inexpressible joy to see him again at her side. Storms had passed over them; but she felt that they were one, despite the strange waywardness of his soul and of their fortune. They sat on a bench and looked down upon the river. He took off his hat and once more passed his hand over his forehead.

"I have lived years in these past months," he said, "years, and I have learned their lesson."

She would have given much to make easier for him the words that must be said. But calmly, deep within her, she knew that to hear them was her right—a right which it would be dangerous to forego. She scarcely moved during the silence of his voice.

"I used to think," he continued, "that we should not accept the imperfect, that we should not risk its dominance over us, that we should resist the elements of evil that inhere in all human institutions. It was a dream of youth! One must accept, accept the good, forget the evil, live and be brave . . . *that* is manhood!"

He lowered his head a little and spoke once more.

"It was the selfishness of passion, not the surrender of love. I tried to evade life, life as it is, as it has shaped itself, slowly, inevitably; I fought not for a right, but for an exemption from the universal lot. It was . . . cowardly."

She laid her hand on his, compassionate to him in his self-abasement.

"How did you come to think so?"

"When I went from you in my pride and stubbornness," he answered; "when it seemed to me that I had lost you, then, at last, love came and taught me. My need of you humbled me; my need of you gave me a clearer vision; but even if the vision had not come, I would have returned to you at your desire, upon your terms, because—I love you!"

The wind grew stronger and cooler and they arose from the seat. They chose a sinuous path through the woodland of Riverside Park and walked slowly. Their footsteps made no sound; the birds had fled or fallen asleep. They heard only each other's tremulous breathing. Gradually a twilight melted down among the trees, and, unconsciously, they walked closer together, their arms touching. The hushed woodland seemed to enfold

them more and more. But suddenly, abruptly, the path turned and they stood together upon a promontory, the river far below and the sunset before them. The trees and the other shore were purple, the sky blood-red fading in an immeasurable distance to faintest mother-of-pearl; the river was a pool of molten bronze. They stood there, breathless before this flaming splendour that lost, by infinitesimal degrees, its sharpness and faded into a large, dim softness of empurpled glow.

Julian took her two hands into his and drew her to him.

"Dearest," he said, and his voice shook, "dearest, I wanted to live by the strength of my pride, of my power, of my intellect. But I looked upon the dawn of the morning, and saw you there; I looked upon the stars of the night, and saw you there; I went away, wandering among the clefts of the hills, and your image was hidden in their hollows; I wrote and the words grew into your name; I turned from the world to find a refuge in my soul, and found you there! Take me and keep me!"

She looked into his eyes, and then up unto the stars that began to gather in the fields of heaven, and it seemed to her that she had come at last from the weary plains of life, beaten upon by scorching

suns, choked with blood and sand, and had emerged into some fair, wide upland region of cool waters and spacious winds, where the fountains are white, and the stars, where love dwells, and blessedness, and a perennial peace.

THE END



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